Buddha in the Crown

Avalokiteśvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka

John Clifford Holt

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JOHN CLIFFORD HOLT

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In Memory of

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PREFACE

Buddha in the Crown has been written primarily for students of religion. The argument I have set forth about the nature of religious change in Sri Lanka is one that need not be regarded as culture-specific, but one that can be tested in a number of other religio-historical contexts. It analyzes how elements of one religious culture are assimilated into another and then legitimated. It is illustrated by an extended case study of the manner in which the Mahāyāna Buddhist bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara was incorporated into a religious culture dominated by Theravāda Buddhism, but it also suggests that similar processes of transformation can be found in Christian, Muslim, Hebraic and Hindu contexts.

The central theoretical question of the study is this: what are the conditions and principles of religious assimilation? In *Buddha in the Crown,* I have argued that new religious forms are incorporated not only because they are understood to be immediately efficacious, but because they can be rationalized within the soteriology of the tradition of which they have become a part and related to its *telos*.

The implication of this argument is that soteriology (the process by which the spiritual *summum bonum* of religion is experienced) is what finally defines religion; it is religion's ultimate *raison d'être* and the quality distinguishing religion from other modes of culture or other kinds of ideology. Specifically, soteriology, the process leading from *dukkha* ("conditioned unsatisfactoriness") to *nibbāna* in the Buddhist context, is *foundational* for meaningful modes of Sinhala religious experience and expression in Sri Lanka; knowledge of it is also the means to decode the symbology of religious art and ritual. Religious soteriology, then, is what puts religious experience, practise, and expression into an ultimate perspective.

It follows from this that if soteriology is foundational, then it is the consummating standard by which new assimilations are measured, incorporated or rejected. If the potential assimilation fails to be related to soteriology (in the Sinhala Buddhist context, if the assimilation is wholly *laukika* ["of this world;

temporal"] bearing no relation to *lōkōttara* ["supramundane; eternal"]), it will not be sustained in religious culture. Or, if it is sustained, it will not be regarded as "religious." Thoroughly *laukika* gods, for instance, become *deus otios* in the religious sense. In Sri Lanka, this will remain the case until Theravāda soteriology, the ultimate frame of meaningful reference in Sinhala Buddhist religious culture, is supplanted. Paradoxically, this also means that thoroughly *laukika*-oriented gods could survive nicely within a thoroughly secularized ideology and culture. Without commitment to a soteriology, a religious culture loses definition. A recent study by Gombrich and Obeyesekere [1988] of religious change in urban Colombo during the past 25 years suggests that this may be happening in some segments of contemporary Sinhala Buddhist culture.

In reading *Buddha in the Crown,* it will be evident that the cult of Avalokiteśvara became part of Sinhala religious culture because it proved, in general, to be efficacious in response to the central problem of human existence identified by the Buddha as *dukkha* ("unsatisfactoriness, suffering"). Suffering, of course, takes many forms, and ways to counteract it are as legion as the forms it takes. The assimilation and transformation of the cult of Avalokiteśvara then, is but one extended example of how concepts of religious action and religious authority function inclusively to meet the needs of the historical situation. When Avalokiteśvara, transformed into the medieval Sinhala national deity Nātha, became identified with the future Buddha Maitreya, he came to symbolize the very soteriology and *telos* into which his cult had been assimilated and legitimated.

This book was also written for students specializing in the study of Buddhism: Mahāyāna, Theravāda and Vajrayāna. These readers will learn that the cult of Avalokiteśvara not only had an extensive and important history within India, but in Sri Lankan religious culture as well, a country that confesses the preservation of Theravāda tradition and, as such, is rarely studied by those whose primary subject of interest is Mahāyāna or Vajrayāna. For students of Buddhism whose primary interest is Theravāda, this study documents how many elements of Avalokiteśvara's cultus were absorbed into wider frames of Sri Lankan religious culture, subordinated to and identified with Theravāda soteriology and cosmology, and continue to be articulated today in various fashions. For all students of Buddhism, I think this study about how and why bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara came to be identified with the future buddha Maitreya through the expressive vicissitudes of art, political history, myth, ritual and symbol will be of considerable interest. Much of Buddhist studies, particularly the study of Mahāyāna, has been framed very narrowly according to philological, quasi-philosophical and apologetic agenda. At the very least, this book will raise questions among students of Buddhism regarding the very

utility of the terms Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna and Theravāda as designating wholly distinctive religio-historical constructs (since the Avalokiteśvara cult apparently spanned them all). It will also raise questions about how the umbrella of Buddhist soteriology has subordinated and legitimated a variety of religious beliefs and actions in cultures where it has become a foundational ideology. I hope it invites similar studies of religious cultures throughout other parts of Asia, particularly in Southeast Asia (Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, and Cambodia) where Mahāyāna and Theravāda have interacted in various degrees of encounter and intimacy throughout history.

Finally, this book was written with and for Sri Lankans, especially Sinhala Buddhists, to join them in realizing how their traditional culture, now being frayed and strained by ethnic chauvinism, political violence, and economic deprivation, is an extraordinarily interwoven fabric of religious variegation. I am aware that some Sri Lankan readers may hesitate to accept my thesis about assimilation and inclusivity within Sinhala Buddhist religious culture. It is a controversial claim to make in the current context, or even historically, because: (1) contemporary Sri Lanka has been raked by the fires of emergent ethnic consciousness and class alienation for the past several years and the current political scene has hardly witnessed a spate of inclusivity on anyone's part; that is, the current sociopolitical climate in Sri Lanka is clearly one of exclusivity and separatism; (2) the history of monastic Theravāda Buddhism in Sri Lanka was periodically marked by clerical purgings effected by kings ostensibly for the purpose of maintaining the *sangha* (order of monks) as a purely soteriological (rather than political) community; contemporary Sinhala Theravādins, both lay and monastic, usually stress that the reason their tradition continues to survive after 2,500 years is that it has been repeatedly purified and purged. Buddhist ecclesiastical history, and its modern apologists, always present the tradition within such an exclusive framework.

But in looking closely at the internal legitimations for these purgations, these actions of exclusivity, one finds that they are almost always legitimated by appeals to Buddhist soteriology, for the sake of the vitality of the Buddha *sāsana* (tradition). I have no intention of denying the presence of exclusivity as an ethos operative historically and currently in Sinhala culture. However, this particular aspect of the religio-cultural dynamic has been continuously overplayed, especially due to its recent politicization. It has even become an objectification in much scholarship on the history of Buddhism, Western and Sinhala. Surely it is an overly simplistic explanation for the longevity of Sinhala Buddhist culture. Even trees need more than pruning to continue to bear fruit. What I am arguing, to the contrary, is that the almost continuous historical assimilation of Hindu and Mahāyāna Buddhist religious elements into Sinhala religious culture has been legitimated by precisely the same

appeals to soteriological concerns appropriated by the exclusive posture. The *raison d'être* of the Buddha *sāsana* is to assuage suffering (*dukkha*) and to pursue a life or lives ultimately leading to *nibbāna*. Insofar as the Avalokiteśvara cult functioned in this way, it could be assimilated.

Sinhala religious culture, of course, has been neither wholly exclusive nor wholly inclusive. My argument is that the inclusive character, which has not been stressed or studied in any depth to date, is actually *more responsible* for the longevity and survival of Sinhala religious culture, especially when seen within the context of a political history of retreat. I agree with the Sri Lankan-American Tamil anthropologist S. J. Tambiah who argues that the current depths of Sinhala chauvinism are largely recent phenomena traceable to this last generation, a development that is, on the whole, an aberration from the historical norm. Sri Lanka's historical "past was a rich, complex civilization that celebrated both difference and complementarity" [1986:63]. The rising profile of ethnic identity in relation to political power and violence has certainly bred exclusivity during the past 25 years. But, to ignore the general dynamics of religiocultural accommodation that have occurred over 2,500 years, particularly the last 1,300, is the opposite of what I intend. In the near future, this manuscript, written from the perspective of a sympathetic cultural outsider, will be translated into Sinhala and published in Sri Lanka. I eagerly await its discussion there.

In writing this book, my manuscript has experienced a series of incarnations. Only a healthy fragment of my research could be systematically integrated into the final whole, the remainder deemed inconsequential to my central argument.

In Chapter 1, I have endeavored to introduce the religious culture of Sri Lanka to unfamiliar readers before setting forth the problems and nature of my argument regarding the relationship between *laukika* and *lōkōttara* in Sinhala Buddhist religious culture. Chapter 2 consists mostly of background essays which are important for establishing the historical context of my argument: the religious significance of Avalokiteśvara in Buddhist Sanskrit literature and Mahāyāna Buddhist metaphysics and cosmology (especially in the *Avalokiteśvara-Guna-Karaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*), the development and scope of the bodhisattva concept in Theravāda thought and Sri Lankan political culture, and the appearance and influence of Mahāyāna Buddhism during the classical Anuradhapura period (first millenium, Christian era) of Sinhala religious culture.

Chapters 3 and 4 illustrate my thesis through a study of Avalokiteśvara's changing symbolic iconography and his concomitant assimilation as a national guardian deity within the political history of medieval Sri Lanka.

Chapter 5 is pivotal, the one I regard as the center piece of this study. It

consists of a close reading of the most widely repeated myth regarding Nātha Dēviyō (Avalokiteśvara transformed) in the up-country region of the island. Here Nātha, portrayed as a Sinhala national guardian deity *par excellence,* loses an unbecoming battle with Piṭiye, an upstart deity of Tamil origins. Nātha's "defeat," however, ironically signals the beginning of his ascent, or the re-recognition of his bodhisattva status, as the next in line to become a buddha. Herein, there is a clear shift away from a *laukika* to a thorough-going *lōkōttara* quest and the seeds are sown for his eventual identification with Maitreya. I contend that this myth also reflects the ethnic and caste tensions surrounding the reign of the last of the ethnically Sinhala kings who passed the Kandyan throne on to Nāyakkars from south India.

Chapter 6 explores the principles of purity and pollution as well as the conflations and encounters between Nātha, lesser deities, and Sinhala Buddhist kingship as these are evinced in oral traditions collected at Nātha *dēvālayas* (temples) in the upcountry Kandyan cultural region.

Chapter 7 is an analysis of calendrical rites, chiefly New Year's and the *Äsaḷa perahära* as these are celebrated at these *dēvālaya*s. The analysis further reveals the centrality of Nātha's medieval role as a repository of *laukika* power appropriated by kingship. Within this chapter, we see how Nātha's *dēvālaya*s functioned as *axis mundi*s of consecrated power ritually distributed to the far reaches of the old Kandyan kingdom. The dynamic of sacral power flowing in both directions between center and periphery is explored.

Chapter 8 is an ethnographic account of an annual rite of dance and possession occurring in a remote Sinhala village outside the pale of the Kandyan ritual system. Here, it will be seen that the cult of Nātha was sustained by its conflation with a lesser Sinhala folk deity, Gala Baṇḍāra (the "Rock Chief"). It illustrates the fact that once Nātha was recognized as Maitreya, he too became a means of legitimating the inclusion of emergent popular practice in Sinhala culture.

In the conclusion, I examine the fate of Nātha as Maitreya in contemporary Sri Lanka noting the process of demythologization taking place among "Buddhist modernists." I also explore the significance of the fact that some urban Colombo Buddhists now regard a contemporary Indian holy man, Sai Baba, as Nātha. What this development perfectly reflects is the manner in which the current and past process of assimilation in Sinhala culture is legitimated. That is, veneration of Sai Baba is legitimate precisely because he has been related to the Nātha, the symbol of Buddhist soteriology and its *telos*.

As I noted, this manuscript has experienced many rebirths and has benefitted by the insights and suggestions of numerous friends both in Sri Lanka and in the United States. Professors Udaya Meddegama, P. B. Meegaskumbura and Anuradha Seneviratna, all of the Department of Sinhala at the University

of Peradeniya, were of enormous help to me in translating significant and relevant folkloric materials and in introducing me to *kapurālas* and *basnāyaka nilamēs* of the Nātha *dēvālayas* in the Kandyan culture area of upcountry Sri Lanka, to whom I also owe a debt of gratitude. During the weeks and months of field work from 1983 through 1985, I was assisted by Mr. H. M. Wijeratna and Bhikkhu Alutnuvara Upatissa, arts students at the University of Peradeniya who patiently bridged the gap between an inquiring Western scholar and the world views of Kandyan villagers. Bhikkhu Dhammaloka, also of the Department of Sinhala at Peradeniya and a resident at the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya,* gathered important data for me regarding the annual cycle of rites celebrated at that centrally important shrine. Ms. Chandani Halwathura assisted me in research at the offices of the Sinhala Dictionary project and at the Department of Archeology in Colombo.

Professors R. A. L. H. Gunawardana and C. R. de Silva of the Department of History at Peradeniya read through various versions of the manuscript's evolution and offered their very helpful constructive criticisms. Professors Steve Kemper and John Strong of Bates College, Charles Hallissey of Loyola University (Chicago) and Frank Reynolds of the University of Chicago also read through later versions of the work. Finally, this work has benefitted immensely from extended conversations over many years with Mr. Jon Walters. His comments and criticisms in response to each of the drafts and his willingness to serve as sounding board while I was researching material in Sri Lanka, proved invaluable to the formulation of this project. I would also like to thank Doctor Sudarshan Seneviratne of the Department of Archaeology, Doctor Gunapela Dharmasiri of the Department of Philosophy, and Professor K. M. de Silva of the Department of History, all of the University of Peradeniya, for their encouragement and inspiration.

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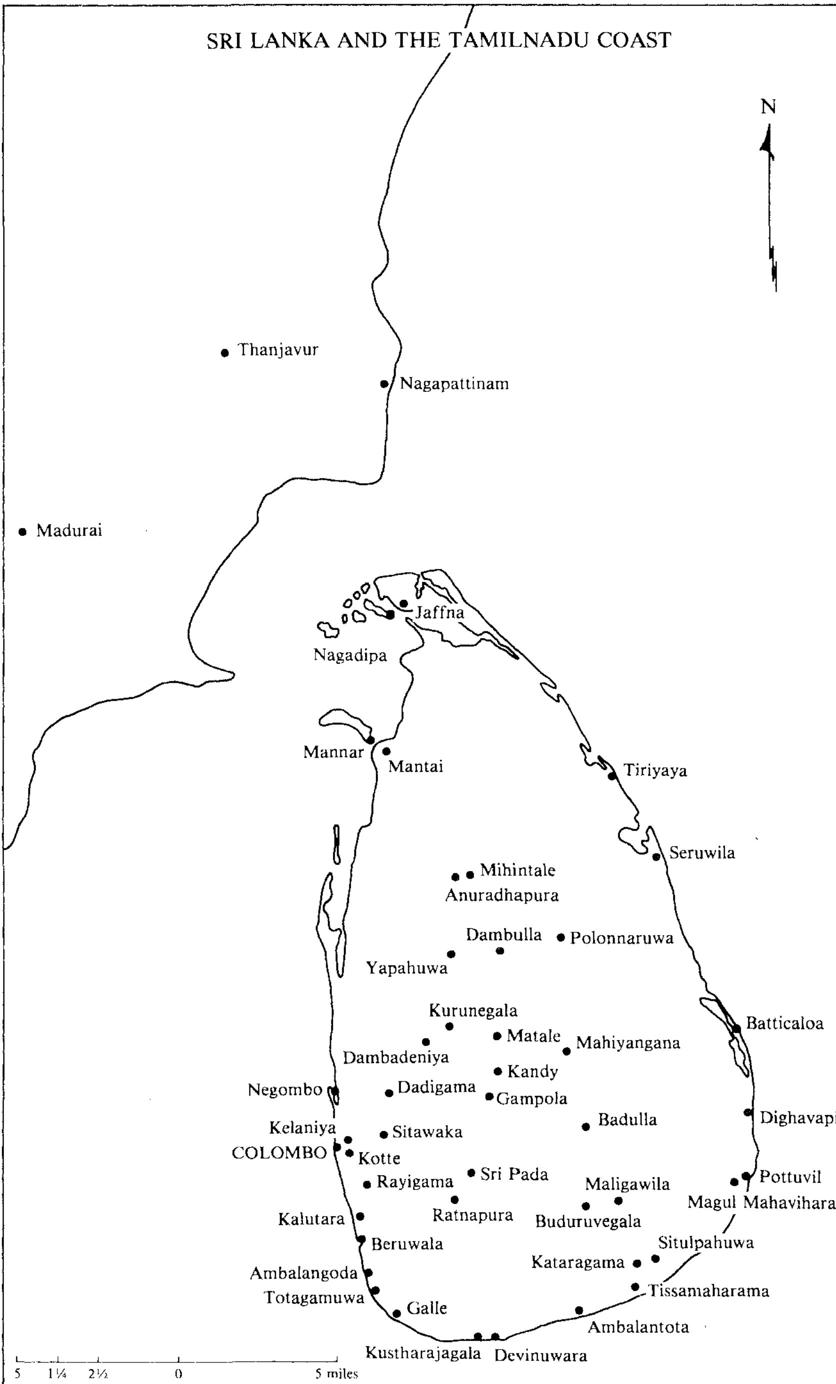
Most importantly, I acknowledge the patience extended by my spouse, Barbara, and my children, Sarah and Samuel, who have endured my obsession in completing this study. Without their support, along with gracious help afforded by Mr. I. G. Sumanesena and Ms. Karlina Basnayaka, this work would never have come to fruition.

A word about the index: No diacritical marks are included because the indexer's computer program did not have the capacity to include them all.

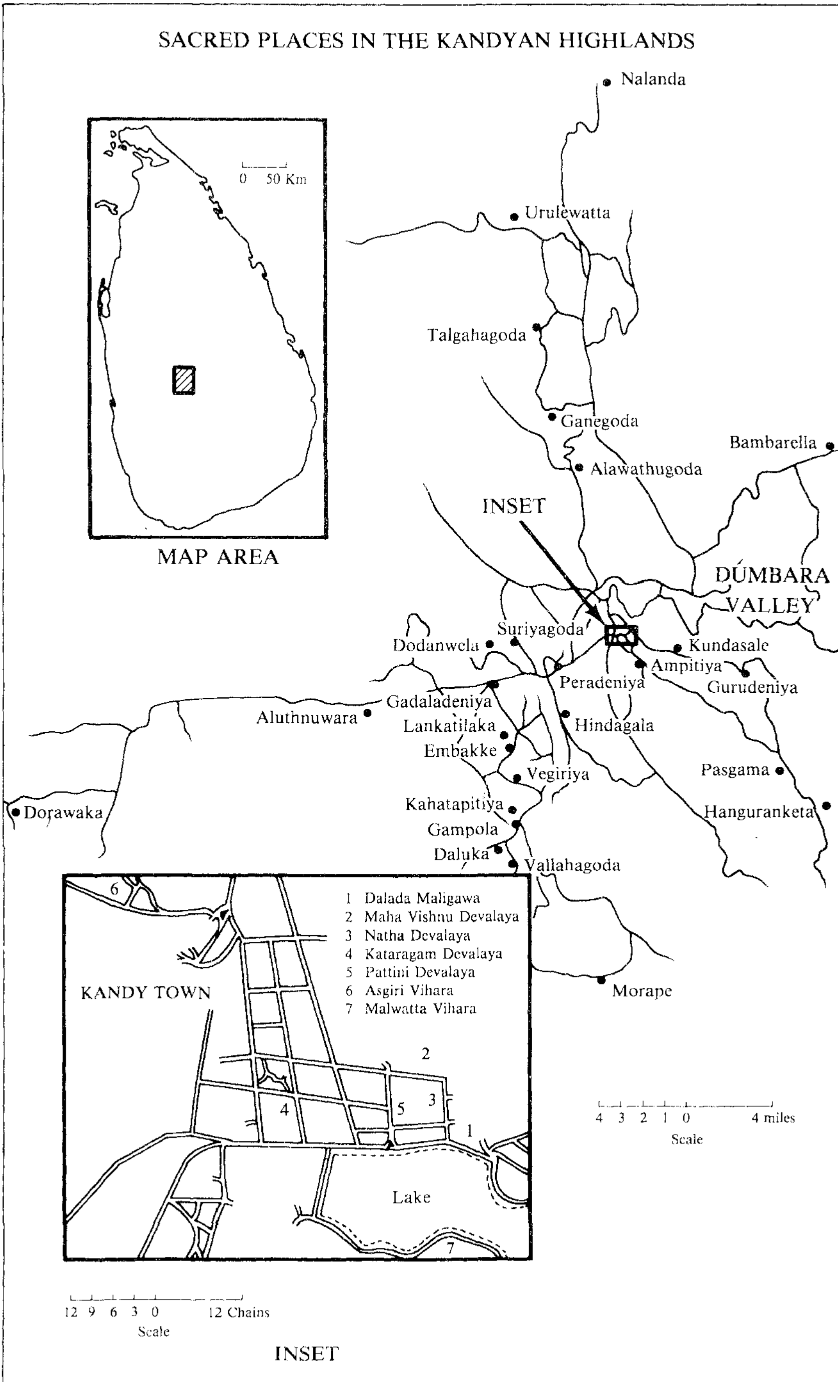
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1

Introduction: The Setting and the Problem

Over the course of its long and complex history, the religious culture of Sri Lanka has changed profoundly. But the religious soteriology[1] of the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, despite the development of rich literary traditions of buddhological commentary and the continuous presence of rival religious traditions, has not. George Bond [1988] has pointed out, for instance, that the basic hermeneutic of of Theravāda has always remained the substance and structure of the *nibbāni*c path itself. Consequently, throughout almost all of its history, Theravāda has been notedly less preoccupied with the types of speculative philosophical analyses engaged in by the metaphysicians who distinguish early Indian Mahāyāna thought, idealistic *religieux* who created a new body of apologetic literature, new ideas about the nature of the Buddha and the cosmos, and new schools of monasticism as well. Because Theravādin creativity generated only interpretive commentaries on already established *Buddhavacana* rather than new *sūtra*s (new *Buddhavacana*) with new teachings, "the Way of the Elders" has understood itself to be a conserving and preserving tradition from the earliest times of its history. In modern Sri Lanka, Theravāda is widely believed to be the purest form of Buddhism doctrinally and practically to have evolved since the Buddha converted his first *bhikkhu*s (monks) and established his *sangha* (monastic order) to preserve his *dhamma* (teaching) some 2,500 years ago in the Ganges river plain.

Theravāda is known in the Buddhist world for its claims of doctrinal purity and for its confession of institutional conservatism, but this book is not about doctrinal purity or institutional conservatism. It is about religious change in a dynamic and fluid culture. Wherever Theravāda has spread, from India to what became its bastion in Sri Lanka, then to Burma, Thailand, Cambodia,

Laos, and other regions of Southeast Asia, it became an ideological foundation of culture as well as a religious soteriology to be personally realized. It has, in short, provided profound and (until recently) enduring answers to the meaning of life as the central question arises religiously (*nibbāna*), philosophically (*dhamma*), sociologically (*sangha*), and politically and economically (models of kingship and laity). The Theravāda worldview has been articulated in a variety of patterns and processes of religiocultural expression, expressions that often originated outside of Sri Lankan culture only to be assimilated in the course of time. This is a book about those patterns and processes, especially those paradigmatically reflected first in the historical assimilation of bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara of Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions into medieval Sinhala religious culture as Nātha Dēviyō and then in Nātha's more modern transformation in identity as Bodhisattva Maitreya (the next buddha of the future expected by virtually all Buddhist traditions of Asia, including the Theravāda).[2] Observable within literary, iconographic, inscriptional, political, and ritual expressions of Sinhala religious culture, these patterns and processes reveal a religiocultural propensity for inclusivity. In addition to the conservative ethos of Theravāda Buddhism per se, Sinhala cultural inclusivity has been one of the primary reasons for the longevity, vitality, and continuity of Sri Lankan religious culture as a whole, and Theravāda's privileged survival in particular.

Transformations in the religious culture of Sri Lanka often have been the consequence of pragmatism: accommodating and assimilating newly imported notions on the basis of their perceived functional efficacy. These new notions, however, have been accommodated and sustained only insofar as they can be legitimated by the established and normatively accepted structures and dynamics of Theravāda soteriology. Thus, assimilated notions did not challenge or alter the Buddhist hermeneutic itself. They merely extended its utility. In this chapter, my primary aims are to describe the process of religious assimilation and transformation in Sri Lanka generally and to identify the fundamental principles and dynamics of religious change intrinsic to Sinhala Buddhism in particular. But before addressing these basic issues, it is important to understand the nature and extent of Sri Lanka's religious diversity.

The Diversity of Sri Lanka's Religious Culture

The contemporary demography of Sri Lanka's religious culture is as variegated as perhaps any other in the world. Sri Lanka's religious diversity is due, in part, to its geographical location. Located off the southern tip of India, this small island country (approximately the size of West Virginia in square miles)

formerly known to the colonial world as Ceylon, has been strategically important to maritime military and mercantile commands throughout history. Recent archaeological finds at Mantai near the modern town of Mannar on the island's northwest coast indicate that for over 2 millennia, Sri Lanka has been a crossroads for the intersection of expanding and trading civilizations—as distant as Rome in the West and China in the East. More than a convenient venue for the exchange of material trade, Sri Lanka has proved a fertile ground for the continuing process of cross-cultural exchange and acculturation.

Rich material and cultural traces of the many distant and foreign interests present throughout ancient, medieval, and colonial times are still conspicuous within various island regions and communities, but the most significant cultural impacts have resulted from wave after wave of immigratory movements out of ethnically diverse regions of the Indian subcontinent, beginning with the traditionally purported arrival of the prototypical Sinhalese in the fourth or fifth century B.C. and culminating in the importation of Tamil tea plantation workers by the British during the last third of the nineteenth century. Immigrants introduced numerous forms of symbol, cult, ritual, and religious belief that were contemporary in the locales of their origins. Migrations due to economic, climatological, or political hardships in India, or, as often, due to military invasions from politically expansive south Indian powers, together with a continuous flow of religious, cultural, and political knowledge between the leading religious institutions of Anuradhapura's classical civilization (the ancient capital from the third century B.C. to the tenth century A.D.) and other centers of religious pilgrimage and political power in India and Southeast Asia, insured that while the monastic Theravāda Buddhist school of the Mahāvihāra monastery could conserve its soteriological traditions in preserved Pāli canonical and commentarial literature, the temporal-historical context of the religion was dynamic and fluid. Within this milieu, many Hindu religious expressions, some of which continue to be observable at a variety of levels of Sinhala Buddhist traditions today, were introduced and acculturated. These acculturated forms of immigrant religion were sustained within Sinhala Buddhism only insofar as they could be integrated and legitimated within the cosmology of Theravāda soteriology.

In Sri Lanka's North Central Province, for example, in the region surrounding the ancient Sinhala capital, the ritual year of many Sinhala Buddhist villagers revolves around the liturgical celebration of transplanted Hindu deities (such as Aiyaṉār) who are quite obviously of south Indian or Tamil origins. In the religious orientation of the villagers, Aiyaṉār is a god of superior protective power. His position within the cosmos is hierarchically higher to theirs, and he is believed to be closer to *nibbāna* (the ultimate

soteriological goal) than they. Villagers expect him to be reborn eventually as a bodhisattva (buddha-in-the-making) of the future. But for now, because of his perceived protective power, he is propitiated for reasons of immediate concern.

The worship of Aiyaṉār is not an isolated example. In fact, throughout all Sinhala cultural regions of Sri Lanka, most Buddhists venerate important deities of Hindu-*brahman*ical origin (Gaṇeśa, Skanda, Viṣṇu, Pattinī, etc.). For many, these gods are very much the focus and center of cultic allegiance, and perhaps even of deep religious faith. They are not accorded the same metaphysical significance that they enjoy within the context of Hindu soteriologies and cosmologies, but their specifically Hindu and *brahman*ical origins are easily demonstrated.

The cults of these deities are popular because they relate well to the worldly needs of common people. The gods are perceived by their devotees as accessible and responsive to entreaties. They are sources of positive power that can be summoned to relatively (but not absolutely) assuage the experience of *dukkha* (suffering). That they are regarded as hierarchically superior, as being farther along the path to *nibbāna*, indicates in general how they have been absorbed by the Sinhalese within the umbrella of Theravāda's soteriology.

A dramatic example illustrating how elements of Tamil Śaivite Hindu culture have been absorbed into the religion of Sinhala Buddhists is provided by the cult of Skanda (Muruḵan), a deity who has been almost a national god in Tamil culture [Clothey, 1983],[3] but who also has been thoroughly domesticated in Sinhala Buddhism as Kataragama Dēviyō. Kataragama has become, like Viṣṇu, Pattinī, and Nātha, a national guardian deity. But while the cults of these deities are generally becoming moribund, Kataragama's continues to thrive. Without a doubt, he is the most widely venerated deity on the island today. In addition to his Sri Lankan Tamil following, his devotees can be found in almost every Sinhala village *perahära* (a public religious procession in honor of the Buddha and the gods) as entranced troupes of dancers strutting and whirling under a *kāvaḍi* (a ceremonial and symbolic arch of the god carried on the devotee's shoulders during the dance). The Sinhala folklore of Kataragama recounting his mighty warrior and romantic deeds of triumph is not only widespread but continues to grow in mythic proportions as pilgrimages to his shrine in the southeastern corner of the island become ever more popular with virtually all cross-sections of the Sinhala Buddhist community.

Another example (more pertinent to the substance of this study) reflecting Sinhala assimilation of Tamil Hindu Śaiva religious forms occurred during the eighteenth century. During this time, four kings of Kandy, the last to claim the inheritance of centuries of Sinhala royal rule, were actually Nāyakkars whose

ancestors originally came from Andra Pradesh but who, by this time, had become thoroughly Tamil in language and culture. While the Nāyakkars have been characterized as becoming "more Kandyan than the Kandyan Sinhalese" [K. de Silva, 1981] during their 75-year reign, the increasing presence of south Indians in the Sinhala up-country capital made yet another important impact on Sinhala religious belief and practice. In Chapter 5, we shall observe how the Sinhala assimilation of the deity Piṭiye Dēviyō resulted concomitantly in fundamentally altered conceptions of the Kandyan national guardian deity, Nātha Dēviyō (the evolved and assimilated Kandyan form of Avalokiteśvara), a development that significantly contributed to Avalokiteśvara's eventual conflation with the future Buddha Maitreya.

In addition to the veneration of gods of Hindu origins per se, the influence of Hindu conceptions of the divine upon Sinhala conceptions of the Buddha has been asserted in H. L. Seneviratne's [1978] study of royally sponsored cultic life conducted at the *Daḷadā Māligāva* ("Temple of the Tooth") during the Kandyan (late sixteenth through early nineteenth centuries) and modern periods. Seneviratne has been able to show how the relic of the Buddha, installed as a palladium of the Sinhala people in the former royal palace of the Kandyan kings, was (and remains so today) ritually cared for *as if it were a Hindu deity*. What this reflects is that the process of acculturation has involved not only the assimilation and transformation of Hindu divinities so that they are accorded a sanctified place within Sinhala Buddhist soteriology and cosmology but a simultaneous impact upon Sinhala buddhological conceptions as well.

Sinhala assimilations have changed the contours of Sri Lanka's religious culture, but ritual, iconographic, and metaphysical expressions of Hinduism have also continued to be expressed within the transplanted and conserved culture of Tamil communities in the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka since very early times. Indrapala [1969: 43–63] has documented the longevity of Sri Lankan Tamil culture on the basis of his study of inscriptional evidence. Its continuing legacy as an expression of Hinduism per se also forms a significant pattern in Sri Lanka's religiocultural mosaic.

The political maturity of Sri Lankan Tamil culture becomes apparent during the last phase of the Polonnaruva period (the thirteenth century), when an independent Tamil state came into existence on the northern peninsula of Jaffna and remained autonomous until it was subjugated first by the Sinhala king at Kotte (Parākramabāhu VI) for a brief time in the fifteenth century and then by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. (Contemporary claims for Tamil autonomy rely heavily upon the independent existence of this medieval kingdom.)

Sri Lankan Tamils now form about 12 percent of the total population of the

country. Despite the recent ethnic troubles, many continue to live and work amid predominantly Sinhala communities. When "Indian Tamils" working on the tea estates in the up-country are included with "Sri Lankan Tamils" in government census figures, together they form about 18 percent of the current total population. The Tamils and the Hindu tradition, however, are but one of the legacies of influence upon Sri Lankan culture in general and Sinhala Buddhist culture specifically.

According to oral tradition, Arab traders brought Islam to Lanka's west coast as early as the ninth century. The fact that most Sri Lankan Muslims today speak Tamil as their first language signals more than Muslim eagerness to learn the language of people with whom they might trade. In fact, most ancestors of today's island Muslims are not of Middle Eastern ethnic origin. Rather, they are largely descendants of migrants from south India. Over the centuries, Tamil-speaking Muslims imported many beliefs and customs originating from the cults of charismatic Sufi saints who had been particularly successful in their efforts to convert Hindus in south India. Inevitably, Sunni orthodox concerns for *sharīʿah* (literally: "path [to the water]"; the integrated Muslim spiritual quest defined by religious and social laws) have further contributed to a cohesive sense of Muslim communal identity and a definitive traditional life-style. Today, more than 1 million people in Sri Lanka (out of a total population of about 16 million) are Muslims. Collectively, the Muslims dominate many important sectors of commerce, trade, and agriculture. Muslim villages and towns are found in most parts of the island. Wherever Muslim communities are found, Muslim schools educate youth in the teachings of the *Qur'ān*. Along the east coast of the island, south of modern Batticaloa, Muslims form a concentrated numerical majority. Outside of that region, Muslims are typically found in most good-sized provincial towns and urban areas dominating trade and transport.

Muslim influence resulting in acculturated religious expressions within Sinhala Buddhism is not nearly as pronounced and much more difficult to identify. But during the course of fieldwork in a village northwest of modern Matale in the northern Kandyan region, I recorded a rustic *kapurāla*'s[4] *yātikāva* (incantation/prayer) in which Mecca was identified along with Sri Pada (Adam's Peak), Kelaniya, Mahiyangana, and Nagadipa as being a sacred place of pilgrimage consecrated by the one-time sacralizing presence of the Buddha.[5] Allah has by no means been incorporated into the hierarchy of the Sinhala pantheon of divinities. But as indicated by Mecca's inclusion as a sacred place, Sinhala Buddhists, empathetic with the Muslim practice of undertaking pilgrimages to places of hallowed import (owing to the fact that pilgrimage always has been an important form of religious devotion for Buddhists throughout Asia since the tradition's early Indian history) have simply revalorized Mecca. For them, Mecca becomes a holy place simply by means

of its attributed association with the symbol of Buddhist soteriology, the Buddha.

While not a major instance of assimilation and change but illustrative of these processes nonetheless, some Sinhalese attribute the recent practice of chanting *pirit* (for peace and prosperity) over loudspeaker systems (that can be heard for miles) to the rival practice of Muslims publicly calling their faithful to prayer. Apparently, Sinhalese see no reason why they cannot appropriate a form of religious expression from another tradition if it can be put to legitimate use. Chants of *sutta*s in the practice of *pirit* are substantively *Buddhavacana*. Here, substance seems to take precedence over form.

In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese, who had become the greatest European maritime power in the Asia of that era, set out to conquer the island for Roman Catholicism with great missionary and military zeal deriving from state-sponsored, Counter-Reformation Iberian fanaticism. While their efforts included forced conversion and the brutal demolition of many Buddhist and Hindu sacred places, they eventually succeeded in establishing the church permanently among both Sinhalese and Tamils living on the coastal fringes of the island. In the sixteenth century, they converted the then Sinhalese king of Kotte, who, in turn, actually deeded the island into their hands.

The Reformed colonial Dutch and the Anglican British were not as successful in establishing congregations among the common people, yet they did succeed in converting many prominent Sinhalese families largely due to reasons of economic and political expediency. As a result, Protestant Christianity became the creed of the Western-educated elite and the trained bureaucrats of colonial administration. In addition, the "Burghers," descendents of European colonists who over the years intermarried with the Sinhalese and Tamils, became wholly ensconced in the financial and landowning class of the colonial economy and society. Altogether, a little over 1 million Christians, including many devout Catholic fisherfolk living chiefly on the west coast of the island, especially in the vicinity of modern Negombo, constitute the modern Christian church. Christianity, in both its Catholic and Protestant traditions, is also now part and parcel of Sri Lankan culture as a whole. Christian influences specifically on the structures of Sinhala Buddhism have become the object of some recent and provocative scholarly studies.

For example, in the study of Sinhala Buddhism during the period of British colonial rule, Malalgoda [1976] and Obeyesekere [1972: 58–78] have described the various social, cultural, and ideological processes that led to the formation of what they have dubbed "Protestant Buddhism." Both scholars have identified the specific manner in which Sinhala Buddhist religious innovations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were emulations of social patterns intrinsic to the Protestant missionary movements of the same time period. In a spirited defensive yet aggressive reactionary campaign,

Buddhists began to respond in kind to the strategies of the Christian missionary enterprise. Some of the more obvious Buddhist "innovations" included the establishment of the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA), the Buddhist Sunday school movement, and the dissemination of printed religious propaganda among the laity. Less obvious and more subtle were the modification of norms of accepted sexual morality and a reassessment of Buddhist ethics to conform with the imported Victorian view. In contemporary Sinhala Sri Lanka, rites of passage, including the details of weddings and funerals among urban middle-class Buddhists, reflect a concerted Christian influence. More conspicuous is the practice of sending greeting cards during *Vesak* (the full-moon day in May that commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and *nibbāna* of the Buddha), a practice clearly derived from the analogous Christmas custom among Christians.

Further, Seneviratne and Wickremeratne [1980] have noted that the Weberian analysis of "Protestant Buddhism" extends to a consideration of how "this-worldly" interventions by Sinhala deities can be regarded as indigenous means of coping with the problematic nature of "worldly stress." Earlier, Tambiah [1973] had discussed the manner in which the theodicy of *karma* results in an "inner-worldly asceticism" motivating economic productivity through the engagement of rational behavior. In both of these studies, attempts are made to account for the "this-worldly" character of Buddhism, a character seen as functionally analogous to the manner in which Christian Protestantism responded to the implications of Calvin's doctrine of predestination.

Each of the great religious traditions of Asian origins (the Buddhist, the Hindu, the Islamic, and the Christian) has almost eclipsed the contributing presence of the aboriginal Väddas, whose "hunting-and-gathering" culture barely survives now in waning strength within small pockets of shrinking wilderness located mostly in the east central region of the country in the area near modern Mahiyangana. While the survival and integrity of Vädda culture are in serious jeopardy, many Vädda beliefs and practices continue to be shared by rural highland Sinhalese, a development discussed in Chapter 8. The legacy of Vädda traditional lore and custom may not disappear completely, even if recent government-sponsored development projects threaten to take away the habitat of their age-old hunting-and-gathering life-style.

Finally, from a study of the traditional Sinhala Buddhist monastic chronicles (*Dīpavaṃsa, Mahāvaṃsa, Cūlavaṃsa, Rājavāliya,* and *Nikāya Sangrahāya*) and from an examination of surviving stone sculptures and literary inscriptions, it becomes clear that Mahāyāna Buddhism was also prevalent in many regions of the island, including the capital city of Anuradhapura, from at least the eighth, if not from the sixth, through the tenth centuries A.D. Of specific interest to this study is the fact that Nātha Dēviyō was originally the

Mahāyāna bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who was not a deity of Hindu or *brahman*ical origins but possibly of Tamil Buddhist origins nonetheless.[5a] The manner of his accommodation and transformation is the primary focus of this study and provides a case study in how assimilation has occurred. The study of the "career" of Avalokiteśvara in Sri Lankan religious culture reveals basic conceptual principles of the Sinhala mind that lend pliability and continuity to its persisting evolution.

In this brief overview, it is clear that the history of religions in Sri Lanka has been a variegated and complex process. While it remains possible to chart or "map out" parts of Sri Lanka (in the past or present) on the basis of the demography of language and religion (especially since in recent times it has become redoubtedly clear that certain factions of these respective communities claim to be self-consciously Tamil Hindu, Muslim, or Sinhala Buddhist and therefore rightful heirs to traditional "homelands"), the fact of the matter is that each of these religious traditions has exerted a concerted impact and influence upon one another throughout the course of Sri Lankan history. In fact, an objective observer is hard-pressed to find anything resembling a "pure Sinhala Buddhist" religious community, a "pure Tamil Hindu" religious community, a "pure Muslim" religious community, or a "pure Christian" community, etc., in Sri Lanka. Not only are many Sinhalese and Tamils Christians, but Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam have often incorporated elements of style and substance from one another.

While the pluralist and sometimes syncretic character of Sri Lankan religious culture in general and Sinhala Buddhism in particular is disconcerting to zealous religious reformers seeking to reestablish or preserve what they perceive to be the original pristine character of their respective traditions, that character is nonetheless a salutary fact of religiocultural history that, when widely recognized, has the potential power to help relativize the hostile gaps of ethnic animosity that have recently separated communities of people who have, in fact, lived amiably in relative accommodation throughout much of their shared history. These ethnic communities not only share a common history of social interaction, but collectively they have shared portions of a common religious culture. This study exemplifies how they have been enriched by the process of defining and refining themselves in relation to one another.

Assimilation and Transformation in Sinhala Buddhist Culture

Trade, geography, politics, and population mobility have contributed to the formation of Sri Lanka's religious diversity, but two major factors are respon-

sible for Sinhala inclusivity in particular, and hence the remarkable ability of Sinhala religious culture to survive for as long as it has: (1) the sociocosmic structures of Theravāda Buddhist soteriology; and (2) the genuine receptivity (recent "militant Buddhism" notwithstanding) on the part of the Sinhalese people to accommodate new cultural fashions and religious forms. Both of these factors, as I will now illustrate, are related.

Theravāda Buddhist religious soteriology is a spiritual quest ideally realized by world-renouncing *arahant*s (Pāli: "worthy ones") who, through a life of monastic dedication, have gained enlightenment and have ended the cycle of rebirth. The *Vinaya* (*Book of Discipline*), the *Sutta*s (*Discourses*), and the *Abhidhamma* (*Reflections*), all of which constitute the sacred texts of the Theravāda Buddhist canon preserved in the ancient Indian language of Pāli, assume, on the whole but with some exceptions, a monastic audience. That is, the rules of monasticism, the Buddha's teachings about truth and his experience of enlightenment, and the psychological and metaphysical implications of his teachings are addressed primarily to the *bhikkhu* mendicant who has left behind the life of the householder in order to tread the spiritual path to *nibbāna* (absolutely unconditioned experience freed from the structures of *saṃsāra* or rebirth caused by *karm*ic retribution). The archetypical model for aspiring Theravāda *religieux* is the historical Gotama Buddha, whose enlightenment experience (seeing reality "as it is") and attainment of *nibbāna* constitute a paradigmatic spiritual achievement. Gotama's spiritual achievement, the experience that made him Buddha ("enlightened" or "fully aware"), is therefore a "chartering" experience across the flood of *saṃsāri*c suffering. His monastic followers are often referred to as "sons of the Buddha."

Although Theravāda is sometimes understood as a religion aimed at the spiritual cultivation of monastic virtuosos, the laity are by no means excluded from a life of spiritual progress. In fact, a number of canonical texts are specifically addressed to the laity for their edification. Their message is straightforward. By living a *karm*ically virtuous life (acting in a morally selfless fashion and supporting the *sangha*), the laity can be reborn in future fortuitous circumstances wherein they may also want to renounce the world and engage in a concentrated quest for *nibbāna*. But *nibbāna,* it must be understood, is the final aim of all Buddhists, lay or monastic, and is attained only after many, many rebirths of successful spiritual endeavors. There are instances in scholastic debates within Pāli literature, especially in the *Milindapañha,* indicating that it is possible for a layman to experience enlightenment. However, treading the *bhikkhu* monastic path exemplified by the Buddha and preserved by the *sangha* remains a universally recognized prerequisite for the attainment of *nibbāna* in all Theravāda countries. Despite the fact that in Sri

Lanka some reform-minded laity have recently envisioned a lay-oriented "Buddhism without *bhikkhus*" [Kemper, 1978], it remains impossible for most Buddhists to imagine that Theravāda can be sustained in any recognizable form without the *sangha*. Not only is the *sangha* viewed as the authoritative preserver of *dhamma* (the truth of the Buddha's teachings), a great "field of merit" to be cultivated by the laity for their own spiritual advantage, and as such one of the three great "refuges" from *saṃsāra,* but the "path of purity"[6] (the Theravāda "hermeneutic") has been unmistakably recognized historically by Theravādins as monastic in structure and scope. Any one at any time can take refuge in the Buddha, *dhamma,* and *sangha,* but for all practical purposes, the life of the monk is regarded as the normative life-style set forth by the Buddha as being the most conducive to winning the final spiritual goal.

Ideally, the *bhikkhusangha is* the collective "this-worldly" realized form of actively engaged enlightenment. Even if one takes into account the proliferation of meditation centers for laymen and "foreigners" established during the twentieth century in Sri Lanka, upon examination one finds that their spiritual "programs" are modeled on the ideals of the routinized monastic experience. It is therefore not an exaggeration to say that, functionally, the monastic *sangha* is to Theravāda laity what the sacramental Church was to medieval Christians. That is, the *sangha* is a soteriological necessity for the laity as well as for its monks. For example, at public Buddhist rites (funerals, almsgivings, *pirit* ceremonies, or *pōya* [full-moon] day activities), merit is not actually earned by the laity until it is *given* by monks who chant special *gāthas* (sacred verses) on their behalf. The presence of a virtuous monk is thus a necessity in order to make merit and therefore to make spiritual progress. The *sangha* would appear to be a necessary mediating spiritual device.

In addition to the fact that the ethos of Theravāda is preponderantly monastic, one of the most distinguishing characteristics of religious thought articulated within Pāli Buddhist literature is that deities of the traditional Indian pantheon have been relegated to a role of little significance in the human quest for *nibbāna.* Sacrificial devotionalism of the orthodox Hindu-*brahman*ical (priestly) tradition, replete with its ritualized hymnodic pleas and prayers to powerful this-worldly gods, is even graphically ridiculed in a number of Pāli texts.[7] Moreover, in the *Mahāparinibbāna suttānta,* Gotama's farewell discourse, *bhikkhus* are pointedly urged to be diligent in the working out of their own quests for *nibbāna.* Deities, no matter how powerful in this world, can be of no assistance to the individual in experiencing *nibbāna.* Even the great gods of the supernatural pantheon must be reborn as human beings, join the *sangha,* and experience enlightenment before they can attain *nibbāna.* This is even true for the future Buddha Maitreya. Theravāda Buddhism is therefore a thoroughly anthropocentric religion. Realizing the soteriological goal depends

upon an individual's ability to purify mental intentions (becoming unconditioned). To act without attachment to "I" is to act ultimately without *karm*ic consequence. While positive *karm*ic consequences resulting from good intentions effect a better rebirth, they also fuel the further course of *saṃsāra*. Their eventual transcendence, which leads to *nibbāna,* is wholly a matter of personal responsibility. Theravāda Buddhism, it would seem, is a soteriology by means of self-effort.

However, as we noted previously, it is crucial to understand that the existence of gods and other supernatural beings is not denied. There is a popular Sinhala expression one often hears among village laity during festivals and rites. It is a summary of what we are referring to: "*Budu saraṇayi, dēvi pihiṭayi,*" meaning: "May you have the refuge of the Buddha and the protection of the gods." In the Pāli *sutta*s, some of the gods are portrayed as great witnesses to the Buddha's supernal accomplishment. Moreover, during the time of the later Kandyan kings, Nātha and Viṣṇu attested to the wisdom of royal judgments publicly announced from the royal palace. Bells ringing from the confines of their temples were thought to indicate their joy and divine approval of the kings' decrees. Gods such as these, it is said, achieved their high rank in the cosmos as a result of the positive quality of their past *karm*ic actions as human beings. In the popular traditions of Burma, Thailand, and Sri Lanka, the most powerful deities are envisaged as great protectors of the *sāsana* (religious tradition) and state. Beyond figuring prominently in the ritual and mythological expressions of national cults, these same gods are believed to operate effectively as potentially powerful sources of assistance in the personal lives of their devotees. In Sinhala Buddhism, the attributed power of the gods not only is thought to counteract destructive forces of nature, the wiles of malevolent spirits, and the sorcery of personal or political enemies, but can also be enlisted positively for the birth of children, the curing of disease, the procurement of rain for abundant crops, and, in general, for any successful venture or opportunity of great immediate importance. Parenthetically, in August, December, and April, many village young people accompanied by their parents can be seen at humble *dēvālaya*s (shrines) on *kemmara* (Wednesdays and Saturdays),[8] queuing up for the recitation of a well-known *kapurāla*'s reputedly powerful *yātikāva,* which, they hope, will curry the god's favor on their behalf and lead to his granting assistance in negotiating the rigorous "make-or-break" examinations constituting the core of Sri Lanka's educational system. No less evident are the massive crowds found especially at Kataragama and Ratnapura for the annual festivals in honor of the nationally important gods Skanda and Saman. At these annual festivals, personal vows undertaken throughout the year are completed, and new ones are foresworn in hopes of gaining the deity's continued favor. For

those who cannot make the annual pilgrimage to the "home" shrines of these deities, annual *mangālyaya*s (festivals) are held locally so that all may approach their deities for timely assistance.

Most of these lay vow takers are confessionally Theravāda Buddhist. Though Theravāda is a religious soteriology finally realized through disciplined self-efforts in a monastic context, the laity remain inclined to petition the gods to assist them in obtaining their immediate desires and in averting any concrete problems arising in their daily lives. The deities are, in fact, the most common and immediate object of lay religious cultic activities in Sri Lanka, despite the fact that they are recognized to be irrelevant to the ultimate and final spiritual quest. The gods operate in the *karm*ic, *saṃsār*ic sphere wherein Buddhists seek improvement in this-worldly conditions. Improvement of living conditions, however, is an antecedent to the quest for *nibbāna,* which ultimately involves the transcendence of all *karm*ic activities.

Most Western theological conceptions, as these have been articulated in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, have little or no relevance to understanding the metaphysics of Sinhala Buddhism. Assimilation between these Western religions and Sinhala Buddhism has not occurred extensively on the theological plane. Since the gods of the Sinhala pantheon have relatively little to do with the *nibbān*ic quest and since they share in humankind's *saṃsār*ic plight, they are categorically not comparable to Allah, Christ, or Yahweh, who are ultimately transcendent deities beyond the locus and time of change. If a Sinhala deity, such as Nātha, becomes increasingly identified with transcendence (on the verge of ending *saṃsār*ic rebirth and gaining *nibbāna*), his cult becomes more *otios*. Ironically (to Western observers), while the popularity of Sinhala deities lies in direct relation to perceived evidence of active power in the human realm, Obeyesekere [1984: 66] has pointed out that this kind of popularity breeds obscurity! The reason for this is that the deity in question, by selflessly helping others, has positioned himself advantageously for the final pursuit of *nibbāna*. Therefore, he becomes increasingly distant from this *saṃsār*ic world and, as a result, ever more distant and unapproachable. As he gets closer to transcending *saṃsāra* and realizing the soteriological goal, he becomes less concerned with mundane problems of this world. It is therefore clear that the powers of Sinhala deities are not rooted in the same conceptions of power attributed to transcendent deities "beyond our realm" who enter into history from the outside in order to transform it. Their divine actions are not evidence of endowed transcendental power, but rather they are the very means by which a transcendental realization may be made possible in the future.

Metaphysically, Sinhala deities retain no absolute ontological status. They embody no essential preexistent divine principle or absolute essence of

"being." As such, they pose no competitive threat to Theravāda soteriology. The character of the Sinhala gods is also at variance with Hindu conceptions of divine ontology and power. Gods of Hindu/*brahman*ical origins who have been incorporated into Sinhala Buddhism have been transformed, emasculated of their "ultimacy," and are more comparable to lesser Vedic deities. For instance, within the context of Sinhala Buddhist cosmology, Viṣṇu is not identified as the "absolute" (*nirguṇa brahman*) who periodically creates the world of material nature (*prakṛti*) or takes on human forms as an *avatāra* (incarnation) to restore threatened *dharm*ic structures. While his function as a preserver has been assimilated in Sinhala Buddhist religion, Viṣṇu is not a "high god" or "creator god" or the efficient first cause of the cosmos. As one of the four national guardian deities of the Kandyan Sinhala pantheon, he is regarded as extremely protective but spiritually inferior to the Buddha nonetheless. He can be approached directly or he can be summoned by means of *mantra*s. Through the mediation of the *kapurāla*s at his *dēvālaya*s, he can be petitioned. His power and role are limited to temporal action only, and his stature never begins to approximate the grandeur of his theological profile so beautifully articulated in classical Hindu mythology and philosophy.

But what strengthens the hand of the Sinhala gods and results, in part, in their popular necessity is the manner in which the Buddha, at once the "culture hero" for the laity and the paradigmatic model of spirituality for the monks, is conceived. The Buddha, according to Theravāda thought, is the *Tathāgata,* or the "thus-gone-one."[9] He has transcended *saṃsāra* and is therefore "beyond" the *saṃsār*ic realms of the gods, men, and other sentient beings. Sometimes he is actually referred to as *devātideva* ("the god beyond the gods"). For *bhikkhu*s, as I have noted, he is the great spiritual archetype to be emulated. For the laity, he is something of a "culture hero," yet his paradigmatic spiritual accomplishments are beyond their present powers to emulate. Because he has transcended *saṃsāra,* he is not available to provide assistance for those in immediate need. Sometimes he is appealed to by the folk in this way, but such practices are usually frowned upon by most monks and educated laymen. So while the Buddha is not available for intercessory help in this world, *deities are.* While monks, at least formally, have little to do with the deities, I have on many occasions observed *bhikkhu*s in *piḷimagē*s (images houses)[10] assisting laymen in making petitions to the gods. Many village monks in rural areas are also well known for their powers of cajoling the deities to cure devotees of diseases. What this seems to represent is not only a basic monastic toleration of the gods but a recognition of their useful functions, especially for the spiritually "less-advanced" laity.

At most *vihāraya*s (monastic compounds and temples), it is not uncommon for *pūja*s (rites of worship) to be performed for a number of different deities

on the very same occasion. In the minds of the people, the gods are not jealous: there is very little in the way of sectarian rivalry between devotees of particular gods. On the other hand, there is a stratified divine hierarchy or ranking of the gods that is determined by principles of role, power, and locale. Below the remote Buddha, who is now "beyond," and below the gods of national significance, are gods of regional jurisdiction (*baṇḍāra* deities). The "boundaries" of these regions, however, are often indistinct. Below the *baṇḍāras* are village deities who protect the interests of the hamlet, and below them a host of spirits of the dead and ambiguous nonmaterial forces animating nature. While the pantheon is stratified, it is also flexible, with new deities having entered the hierarchy periodically at all levels except at the top, where the Buddha "presides."

Thus, the Sinhala pantheon, the key cosmological expression of Sinhala Buddhism indicating degrees of *karmic* retribution, is indeed somewhat fluid. This is due to the fact that *saṃsāra* is envisaged as a dynamic process of change. More practically, it is also due to the fact that there is no overseeing ecclesiastical, bureaucratic hierarchy to regulate or appoint the positions of deities. Not only has the Buddhist *sangha* not opposed worship of the gods by the laity, it has also remained unconcerned, for the most part, with changes that take place within the pantheon. As one eminent *bhikkhu* from Colombo put it to me: "The gods are simply not my business." As a result, cultic pluralism in the nonmonastic arena of Sinhala Buddhism has been invited.[11]

The inclusive propensity of Sinhala Buddhism and culture cannot be solely attributed to the nature of Theravāda monastic dispositions toward the gods, nor simply to the fact that since Theravāda soteriology is cultivated at the advanced levels within a monastic framework, the laity are free to invoke the gods of their own free choice. The Sinhala propensity to assimilate and domesticate is observable in a variety of other aspects of Sinhala culture as well. One can see the same proclivity to incorporate at work in music, dance, and art. That is, new cultural fashions, like new gods, are assimilated if they are perceived as functionally advantageous or if they resonate with new inchoate desires for expressions that are commensurate with contemporary social experience. In Sinhala culture, evidence of the acculturation of new forms of cultural expression from India and from the colonial Portuguese, Dutch, and British is ubiquitous.

The incorporation of new cultural forms is not the same thing as tolerating "minority" expressions. Acculturated fashions actually become a part of the sociocultural mosaic, just as "Hindu" gods and a Mahāyāna bodhisattva actually became part and parcel of Sinhala Buddhism. While we have noted how incorporated gods of the Hindu pantheon have been "buddhicized" and subordinated to the Buddha and his spiritual path within the traditional Sin-

hala view of the cosmos, that is but one specific pattern of domestication. To illustrate the general Sinhala propensity to domesticate, I quote at length from a modern Sinhala writer [Siriwardena, 1984] commenting upon how the Sinhalese have historically assimilated many different types of cultural forms:

> We are all aware that baila music, whose origins are also Portuguese, has become Sinhalized, has been adapted to the accents and idioms of colloquial urban Sinhala speech, and has acquired a vigorous and independent life in its transplanted forms so that it has become the most robust form of urban folk music. How [or why] did a form of music borrowed from a cultural minority become a vehicle of popular creativity? Because its energetic rhythms lent themselves to the expression of the urban experience and sentiment, as the traditional forms of Sinhala folk music rooted in the rhythms of rural life did not. Cultural borrowings have only a viable existence when they fulfill the need of the borrowers themselves. So too, the Parsee semi-operatic theatre became at the turn of the century the stimulus for the Tower Hall drama, and Sinhala nadagama derived not only from the Tamil folk drama, but also from Portuguese Catholic devotional music—to issue ultimately in Dr. Sarachchandra's creation 'Maname,' which created a revolution in contemporary Sinhala theatre [10; brackets mine].

Siriwardena cites further examples of "Sinhalization" in cookery, food, dress, architecture, and speech before coming to the fundamental point I wish to emphasize: that the "merit of Sinhala culture has been its openness to other influences and its readiness to borrow, adapt and to incorporate elements from an 'alien' source, which actually cease to be alien when they are incorporated" [10]. Siriwardena concludes that this traditional virtue of Sinhala culture has a tendency to be ignored in contemporary Sri Lanka because of the comparatively recent stress from many politically influential quarters that, for 2,500 years, Sinhala civilization has preserved its religiocultural purity. Writing after the horrendous July 1983 pogrom directed against Tamil people, and searching for ways to diffuse ethnic tensions, Siriwardena argues that the media and educational institutions need to emphasize the recognition of "the diverse ethnic strands that have gone into the making of our nationhood and the various elements that these ethnic groups have contributed to our [Sinhala] culture, and indeed to our daily existence" [10; brackets mine].

The pluralistic character of Sinhala Buddhism is but one aspect (albeit an important one) of a pliable and absorbing Sri Lankan religious and cultural ethos. The traditionally "tolerant" attitude of Theravāda monasticism toward popular cultic orientations of Sinhala religion as a whole, owing to its cenobitic orientation and *saṃsāra-nibbāna* bifurcation of the cosmos, complements the "absorptive" liberality of the Sinhala penchant and historical experience. Together, these factors have helped to instill an ethic wherein new

ideas, expressions, and fashions are welcome if they seem to be efficacious on the level of practical everyday life and they are responsive to the contemporary social experience.

Principles of Religious Change in Sinhala Buddhism: *Laukika and Lōkōttara*

Our discussion regarding factors contributing to the propensity for religious change in Sinhala religious culture requires a more thoroughgoing analysis of "deep structure" on the conceptual level of Sinhala thought. In the argument that follows, an argument constituting the thesis of this book, I will present a theory of religious change based upon a consideration of Buddhist hermeneutics and substantiated by the extended case study of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who became the Sinhala deity Nātha and was ultimately transformed in identity to become the bodhisattva Maitreya.

Laukika and *lōkōttara* are two Sinhala terms that previous scholars have taken to have definitive categorical importance for the structure of the Sinhala Buddhist worldview. *Laukika* and *lōkōttara,* both derivative of Vedic *loka* ("space" or "world"), can be used in Sinhala as contrasting terms: the former can mean "of this world," while the latter can mean "above" or "beyond this world."

On the basis of extensive fieldwork and subsequent retrospective anthropological analyses conducted over a generation ago, Michael Ames [1964: 21–52] suggested that these two emic terms correspond well to Emile Durkheim's understanding of "profane" and "sacred," respectively, that *laukika* is descriptive of mundane hopes and desires, and that *lōkōttara* is descriptive of ultimate spiritual aspirations. The merit of Ames's suggestion lies in the fact that, on the surface, *laukika*-oriented, or "this-worldly" activities (following Weber) seem to be wholly mundane, performed for the purpose of "worldly recompense" and for immediate existential satisfaction. We have noted that Seneviratne and Wickremeratne have understood divine intervention in this fashion. *Lōkōttara*-oriented, "other-worldly" actions may not be performed for purposes wholly relevant to daily life. Rather, they are performed for the purpose of what eventually lies "beyond this realm." For Ames, *laukika*-oriented rituals are primarily practical and magical, while *lōkōttara*-aimed activities are of a more specifically religious nature.

Ames's finding would also seem to be consistent with the analyses and theories advanced by Mandelbaum [1964, 1966] and, to a certain extent, especially with regard to *laukika,* with an analysis of rituals subsequently advanced by Moore [1975]. Mandelbaum had argued, on the basis of his own

extensive studies of South Asian religion, that religious people in India and Sri Lanka tend to carry on two distinct modes of ritual activity: (1) the "transcendental," in which rites are used to address the great deities of orthodox *brahman*ical tradition out of ultimate concern for the fate of the soul (*ātman*) and in which the purity of priests remains of utmost importance to the perceived efficacy of ritual transactions; in the Sinhala Buddhist context, this would translate into activities ultimately concerned with attaining *nibbāna* and the important presence of virtuous *bhikkhu*s (the *sangha*) on hand to assist in the making of specific spiritual progress; and (2) the "pragmatic," in which rites are performed to deal with problems specifically "of this world" (illnesses, droughts, etc.) in which concern for the purity of priests is not a major factor; in the Sinhala Buddhist context, this would translate into the kinds of petitions normally placed before the deities by a *kapurāla,* who, while a man of power, is not regarded with the same high level of respect generally accorded to a Buddhist *bhikkhu.* The nature of "pragmatic" rites has been further specified by Moore in a discussion that focuses on how ritual can become a means of seizing power through manipulative

> "situational adjustment" by those seeking to arrange their immediate situation . . . by exploiting the indeterminacies in the situation, or by generating such indeterminacies, or by reinterpreting or redefining the rules or relationships. They use whatever areas there are of inconsistency, contradiction, conflict, ambiguity or open areas that are normatively indeterminate to achieve *immediate* situational ends [214; emphasis mine].

Moore's description closely corresponds to the types of situations and magical techniques frequently employed by village *kapurāla*s to gain advantages sought by their clients. While not all practices and procedures undertaken by *kapurāla*s on behalf of their clientele are so blatantly exploitative in nature, the crucial point to be grasped here is that the desired benefits are situational and *immediate* in nature. This insight, as we shall soon see, is of great importance in understanding the distinction between *laukika* and *lōkōttara* in Sinhala Buddhism.

The Ames cum Durkheimian cum Mandelbaum contrastive understanding of *laukika* and *lōkōttara* is fundamentally *loca*tive in nature (which, in fact, is literally and etymologically correct). Basically, it is "area conscious" with regard to the actual arenas of ritual activity and with regard to the cosmological or soteriological "aim" or intention of ritual action. *Laukika* is this-worldly-directed, and *lōkōttara* is other-worldly.[12] The two are entirely different domains: sacred space is marked off from profane space just as *laukika* is "this-world" and *lōkōttara* is "beyond."

A problem arises, however, when Durkheim's understanding of the circum-

scribed, marked-off "sacred" is injected into the analysis. According to Durkheim, the "sacred" zone is clearly marked off from the "profane" or mundane by principles of purity and pollution enforced through the observance of taboos. This certainly holds true for monastic *vihārayas*. But, in the Sinhala worldview, rituals directed to the gods at the residences or shrines (*dēvālayas*) of the gods are indeed also quite clearly marked off and separate from surrounding profane or mundane space. And there is a great concern for physical, mental, and spiritual purity when observing rites performed by *kapurālas* at *dēvālayas*.

The gods and the mundane requests directed to them are regarded by the Sinhalese categorically as not *lōkōttara* but thoroughly *laukika*. Durkheim's notions of sacred and profane coupled with Ames's suggestion that we equate them with *lōkōttara* and *laukika* are therefore potentially confusing for the situation at hand, for the *dēvālaya* is both sacred (marked-off space) *and* mundane (*laukika*). That is, within sacred space, the fulfillment of mundane desires is ritually articulated. Furthermore, while Mandelbaum's functional analysis also has great merit, one is hard-pressed to explain why it is the case that in Sinhala religious culture there is also a great deal of concern for the purity of the *kapurāla* and the precincts of the *dēvālaya* in order to render rituals efficacious. Thus, for Durkheim, what would appear to be sacred for the Sinhalese is, in fact, also categorically mundane; and for Mandelbaum, while he would expect that as a result of the pragmatic nature of requests made by *kapurālas* to the gods on behalf of clients there would be a corresponding lack of concern for purity, purity in fact does actually remain a major concern.

One implication of this approach and a possible, though ultimately problematic solution to this contrastive manner of understanding *laukika* and *lōkōttara* is to invoke Redfield's frequently deployed categories and to identify the latter with the "great tradition" (here to be identified with the Theravāda soteriology of Pāli literary traditions) and the former with the "little tradition" (here to be identified with the this-worldly ritual transactions involving the various deities of the Sinhala pantheon). While this is a useful delineation and perhaps underscores the fact that two strands of religion (pan-South and Southeast Asian Theravāda Buddhism on the one hand and local magical Sinhala traditions on the other) have been historically wedded within the same cultural milieu, the fact of the matter is that for the Sinhalese, the entire corpus of religious belief and practice of *both* ("great" and "little") traditions forms *one interrelated* religious system. Obeyesekere [1963] refers to this "combinated" tradition as "Sinhalese Buddhism" and rightly rejects attempts that have been made to separate them out as two ill-fitting parts of a religiocultural puzzle. Ames also has asserted that religion in Sri Lanka forms a unitary structure. Furthermore, veneration of the deities in the general man-

ner and function observed in traditional Sri Lanka is also found in other Theravāda countries, specifically Burma and Thailand. That is, the character of this "little tradition" is not really so local but can be found in similar forms and related to Theravāda Buddhism (the "great tradition") wherever Theravāda has dominated culture.

Noting the problems of the spatial Durkheimian model and the difficulties of the functional Mandelbaum perspective, and taking into account Obeyesekere's and Ames's point that Sinhala Buddhism forms one unitary religious system in the minds of the vast majority of its tradition-minded participants, it seems worthwhile to advance yet another interpretive model.

Laukika and *lōkōttara* are deeply imbedded terms with various shades of meaning involved. Carter, in his *Sinhala/English Dictionary* [1924: s.v.], offers the following definition for *lōkōttara:* "pre-eminent in the world." He also notes that *lōkōttara* means the opposite of *laukika,* defined as "pertaining to the world, mundane, secular, and unspiritual." *Lōkōttaracittaya* is defined as "the mind exalted above the world by religious meditation and attainment." To have *lōkōttara* thoughts is, therefore, to be "in the world pre-eminently by virtue of the fact that one is not attached to this world."

The Pāli understanding of the term *lokuttara* (Sinhala: *lōkōttara*) is very helpful here. Rhys Davids and Stede [1921: s.v.] note that *lokuttara* is "in ordinary sense: the highest of the world, sublime, often applied to Arahantship" (the Theravāda soteriological realization of *nibbāna*). Indeed, *lokuttara dhamma* refers to the state of spiritual perfection (*nibbāna*) attained by the *arahant.* In later canonical literature, Rhys Davids and Stede find that *lokuttara* evolves into "beyond these worlds, supramundane, transcendent, spiritual. In this meaning it is applied to the group of *nava lokuttara dhamma* (viz. the 4 stages of the Path: *sotapatti,* etc., with the 4 *phala*s, and the addition of *nibbāna*)." It is therefore a reference to what Bond has identified as the Theravāda "hermeneutic."

What these definitions suggest, then, is that locative interpretations of the two terms, though more literal and in accordance with the etymological roots of *loka,* may be somewhat limited. If *lōkōttara* means "sacred," it doesn't necessarily mean to be "marked off" or protectively "tabooed." We have noted this problem in relation to the *laukika*-oriented rites at the "marked-off" *dēvālaya* that are categorically understood as *laukika. Lōkōttara* means, rather, to be consummately, unconditionally, absolutely present but "unattached" in this world. *Laukika* means to be attached to this world, tied to the desires of this world, or, better, to be conditionally given over to the interests of this world.

My suggestion is that although Carter tells us that *lōkōttara* and *laukika* are opposite terms and has defined them contrastively, we should not interpret

them dualistically. Rather, it seems to make more sense to understand them within the same bounds of reference, within one system of cosmology; nor do they need to be treated only as bipolar principles acting always in opposition to one another dynamically or dialectically. That is, instead of understanding these terms as denoting two simultaneously existing yet mutually exclusive spheres (which, in fact, they have a genuine tendency to do if understood only locatively), we should also understand them *temporally* within the framework of Theravāda spiritual imagery. In Moore's statement cited previously, rituals of "situational adjustment" are performed for "immediate [temporal] and situational [locative] ends." *Laukika* is actually just that: "situational" and "temporal." To put the matter in terms of Buddhist religious discourse, to be *laukika*-oriented is to be "conditioned," to act on the basis of temporal and situational attachments. In terms of Buddhism's "pathway" imagery or its hermeneutic, to be *laukika*-oriented is always antecedent processually to *lōkōttara*. Conditioned existence in *saṃsāra* is, in fact, antecedent to the experience of *nibbāna*. The path to *nibbāna* is one of becoming "increasingly" unconditionally oriented, or *lōkōttara*, a meaning that is much more consistent with the Pāli understanding of *lokuttara*.

The actions of the gods (*laukika*), therefore, do not necessarily stand in opposition to the actions of the Buddha (*lōkōttara*), nor need they necessarily be understood in contrast. According to the Sinhala Buddhist perspective, though the gods may be involved in granting *laukika* requests, they are also on the path to *nibbāna* (*lōkōttara*) themselves. Moreover, as the matter was put to me by a learned religious scholar of Sinhala: "While the devotee making requests may have *laukika* intentions, the god may have the devotee's ultimate *lōkōttara* welfare in mind when he responds." Just as the *sangha* requires prosperity and stability in the world as a platform upon which its members can stand and make spiritual progress, so the devotee of the gods wants to achieve favorable *laukika* circumstances conducive to making his own *lōkōttara* progress. Or, to put the matter yet another way, this one political, a well-known adage of Sinhala Buddhist tradition states: "The country [*laukika*] exists for the sake of the religion [*lōkōttara*]." That is, good *laukika* conditions are necessarily required for *lōkōttara* realization.

What follows from this, then, is that any view of Sinhala Buddhism that unequivocably identifies *lōkōttara* with "religion" (*āgama*) and *laukika* with "unspiritual" [Carter] misses a very crucial point. In Buddhism, the fundamental existential problem faced by every human being is *dukkha:* "suffering," "dis-ease," perhaps better translated as the "unsatisfactoriness" caused by actions motivated by desire or performed out of ignorance. Accordingly, the Buddhist response to *dukkha* is to cultivate a mind-set, acquire wisdom, hold values, and take actions that militate against the perpetuation of *dukkha*.

This mind-set and wisdom, these values and consequent actions, outlined in great depth in the Pāli canon, are the religious substance of Buddhism upon which its soteriology is founded. All actions (*laukika* or *lōkōttara*) undertaken to realize spiritual ease in the face of "dis-ease" or suffering are inherently "religious." Whether or not they are primarily *laukika* or *lōkōttara* reflects the present degree of spiritual progress or awareness attained. Further, *laukika*-oriented actions may be indirectly aimed at *lōkōttara*. For instance, the actions undertaken by Sinhala kings to protect Buddhism often involved the taking of life, which, on the surface, are not *lōkōttara*-directed actions when viewed from the ultimate moral perspective. However, because those actions were undertaken with the intention of perpetuating the religion of the Buddha, they take on an indirect *lōkōttara* significance in the Sinhala view.

What I am suggesting is that we view these two crucial terms as representing two overlapping orientations of a single dynamic whole: the *laukika* side representing the conditioned, temporal, and antecedent orientation and the *lōkōttara* representing the unconditioned, eternal, consummate orientation. All beings (no matter how *laukika*-oriented) exist within the same cosmos according to their spiritual attainment, and the gods assist them in *laukika* ways to help them forward to eventual *lōkōttara* realization. For example, the curing of physical illness is a *laukika* concern but also an existential requirement for one to be in a condition to make spiritual progress. Illness is also a form of *dukkha* (suffering). *Laukika* acts, therefore, may also be regarded as "religious acts" insofar as they inhibit the experience of *dukkha* and ultimately serve a *lōkōttara* purpose, even indirectly.

This understanding, I would assert, is consistent with the Theravāda Buddhist soteriological view and remains functionally at work in contemporary Sinhala Sri Lanka, a finding I will discuss at length in the conclusion. Let me now illustrate how it has been operative from the very beginnings of Buddhism.

In Frank Reynolds's discussion [1972] of the "two wheels of *dhamma,*" based upon his study of *sutta*s in the Pāli canon and emergent forms of sacral kingship in South and Southeast Asia, he argues that within the myths and symbols associated with the Buddha Gotama there are present two complementary archetypes of religious behavior: on the one hand, there is Gotama as the Buddha making his discovery of enlightenment and articulating the truth of his spiritual emancipation to his mendicant followers; on the other hand, there is the complementary image of the *cakkavatti* (universal monarch) who conquers the world and rules by righteousness. Both archetypes assuage *dukkha*. Reynolds's argument [1972: 6–30] is that both possibilities are pregnant and legitimized in the myths and symbols associated with the Gotama's birth and his celebrated antecedent "rebirths." S. J. Tambiah [1976] has elaborated

the ways in which these two spiritual models (the "world conqueror" and the "world renouncer") have been manifest in the social and political history of Theravāda Buddhist traditions, especially in Thailand. My suggestion is that these archetypes of religious behavior are delineated by their fundamentally *laukika* (*cakkavatti*) and *lōkōttara* (Buddha) orientations. They are not, however, mutually exclusive or essentially contrastive in nature. They are, rather, complementary. In the emergent mythological traditions of Buddhist eschatology, the *cakkavatti* always precedes the Buddha; in fact, he prepares the world for his appearance.[13]

In the case study to follow, however, we are primarily concerned with neither the Buddha nor the *cakkavatti*. The focus is specifically upon the bodhisattva figure and the gods. While it is clear that the gods belong to the *laukika* orientation, the bodhisattva figure seems to encompass *both laukika* and *lōkōttara*. Avalokiteśvara not only saves his devotees from physically threatening situations (*laukika*) but is an embodiment of the true *dharma* (*lōkōttara*) as well. What we will see in our study is that while the *cakkavatti* image (whose historical realization for Theravāda kingship in South and Southeast Asia was the third-century B.C. Indian emperor Aśoka) became the formally accepted paradigmatic model of kingship, the image of bodhisattva actually proved to be the more compelling model of self-projection for many Sinhala kings; it was not only the duty of the kings to promote the spiritual well-being of the *sangha* (*lōkōttara*), but it was also their duty to provide for the material well-being of the laity (*laukika*). In fact, the former was dependent upon the latter. The king, in fact, was empowered to undertake whatever measures were necessary to insure the well-being of the state, which supported the *sāsana*. *Daṇḍa* (expedient use of power) was justified by the motive of preserving the Buddha's *dhamma*.

It should now be clear that what I am arguing is that petitions to the gods, the "secular" work of kings, and attempts to meet the everyday needs of the common people can be considered religious acts, in the broadest sense of the term, within the Theravāda soteriological context, despite the fact that they are *laukika*-oriented. What has not been stated, however, and this is a fundamental point, is that the *laukika* orientation is where we find the greatest amount of assimilation taking place in Sinhala Buddhism. And the *lōkōttara* end is the direction where we find such transformations being legitimated.

Much of the gamut of popular religious practices in Sri Lanka is a variegated mix of cultic expressions appropriated from a wide variety of sources: some specifically Mahāyāna, others of Hindu, Christian, Muslim, or Vädda origination. Some of these are potentially more *lōkōttara*-oriented than others. For example, merit earned at almsgivings, pilgrimages to specifically Buddhist holy sites, participating in *upasampadā*s (monastic ordinations),

observing the 8 or 10 precepts on full-moon days, meditating, or simply hearing the *dhamma* preached are primarily *lōkōttara*-directed because they are fundamentally connected to the *triratna* of Buddha, *dhamma,* and *sangha* and the soteriological ideal that they articulate. Others, even though they traditionally are thought to be sanctioned by the Buddha (and, indeed, the Buddha is invoked on these occasions) are not. Ritual exorcisms, astrological consultations, and propitiations of the gods are *laukika*-oriented. Their popularity lies in direct relation to their perceived functional success. If they are functionally a success, then they will become increasingly linked to *lōkōttara* concerns. Hence, exorcisms now begin with an invocation of the Buddha, and *bhikkhus* may also be asked to attend.

With specific regard to the assimilation and transformation of bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, my essays will show how this Mahāyāna figure, originally embodying the concerns of both *laukika* and *lōkōttara,* became identified with Nātha Dēviyō not because he was regarded as a great soteriological force but because he was perceived to be a powerful source of protection for the Sinhala nation. That is, his *laukika* relevance was emphasized during the process of his assimilation for apparent political reasons. Later, due to the disestablishment of traditional kingship, the waning political fortunes of the Sinhalese, and the increasing rationalization of modern Buddhist reformers, Nātha became increasingly identified with the future Buddha Maitreya, wherein his *lōkōttara* significance was reasserted. If the assimilation and transformation of Avalokiteśvara are exemplary, a generalizable pattern is clear: assimilation takes place at the popular level of Sinhala culture due to *laukika*-perceived pragmatic efficacy and is then legitimated eventually as *lōkōttara*-related if genuinely related to Theravāda soteriology.

What is unique about Avalokiteśvara is that he originally embodied *both laukika* and *lōkōttara* orientations within a Mahāyāna context, a finding clearly demonstrated in Chapter 2. His assimilation into Sinhala culture, detailed iconographically and historically in Chapters 3 through 8, originally took place because of his *laukika* prowess. Although Avalokiteśvara/Nātha is now identified with the future Buddha Maitreya (the *lōkōttara* topic discussed in Chapter 9), it is his *laukika* prowess that continues to be celebrated latently in a handful of up-country Kandyan villages where his cult has survived since the medieval period. The bulk of this study is directed at ferreting out this surviving significance.

2

The Relevant Historical and Doctrinal Background

Theravāda and Mahāyāna

Sri Lanka's Theravāda tradition traces the lineage of its orthodoxy and orthopraxy through the celebrated missionary Mahinda Thera, the purported son of the great third-century B.C. Indian emperor Aśoka, and from Mahinda back through Indian Sthaviravāda (Pāli: Theravāda) oral reciters of *dhamma* and *vinaya* to the earliest disciples of the historical Gotama (the Buddha): Sariputta, Mahāmogallāna, Ānanda, and Upāli, among others. This lineage, together with Pāli *vinaya* accounts of "great councils" convened to settle monastic disputes within the *sangha,* have been particularly important for Theravāda communal identity for they distinguish the early Indian history of the Sthaviravādins (and other Hīnayāna ["Little Vehicle"] schools) from the emergent Mahāyāna schools of monasticism and lay practice that eventually thrived within the religious culture of India in the early to middle centuries of the first millennium A.D.

It is difficult to know with any significant degree of certainty exactly how unity within the early Buddhist *sangha* was originally fractured. Suggestions in Pāli sources indicate that, even during the lifetime of the Buddha, there may have been schismatic pressures within the monkhood. Early *vinaya* ritual traditions, including the *pratimokṣa* and *pavāraṇā,*[1] had created a binding effect upon the community that sustained an ethos of egalitarian collectivity and responsibility. However, as a community under its own *samaya* within ancient Indian society,[2] the *sangha* was largely a self-regulatory social institution, a semiautonomous institution that was bound to witness competing interpretive understandings (buddhological bickerings) of what constituted the true teachings and practices leading to the final religious goal.

According to the last chapters of the *Cullavagga* in the Theravāda Pāli *Vinayapiṭaka,* the first sustained division within Buddhist monasticism occurred between the Sthaviravādins and the Mahāsaṃghikas ("Great Assembly"), the latter often identified as possible forerunners of later Mahāyāna schools. The particular dispute in question is said to have been the result of a disagreement regarding seemingly minor rules of monastic discipline (*vinaya*): the Sthaviravādins charged the Mahāsaṃghikas with laxity in observing these details of discipline; on the other hand, the Mahāsaṃghikas argued that the Sthaviravādins were unwarranted in unnecessarily expanding the code of discipline and therefore applying too many restraints on the lives of the spiritually adept [Prebish and Nattier, 1975]. The details of discipline in dispute are minor at first glance, but the argument over them actually involved the more fundamental principle of how to interpret and realize the truth of the Buddha's teachings (*dharma*) in moral practice and social etiquette (*vinaya*). It is interesting to note that perhaps the earliest use of the Buddhist Sanskrit term *avalokita* is found within the *Mahāvastu,* a scriptural text containing the teachings of these same Mahāsaṃghikas whose ideas were viewed by the more conservative Sthaviravādins as too innovative.

Many scholars have tended to equate the preserved Theravāda literary traditions, particularly the Pāli *Vinayapiṭaka* and four *nikāya*s of the *Suttapiṭaka,* with the original teachings of "early Buddhism." However, it is likely that many of the "later" religious conceptions and practices articulated within the emergent Mahāyāna schools were present, at least latently, in the earliest period of the Buddhist historical experience. Nonetheless, the origins of the Mahāyāna per se are historically obscure.

While an accurate reconstruction of early Buddhist history and the rise of Mahāyāna is not entirely feasible now, general comparisons between particular ideas held by the Theravāda Pāli school and rival Mahāyāna traditions are possible. It is ironic, perhaps, that the differences between these maturing orientations do not really settle on interpretations of monastic discipline but rather more deeply on the very manner in which the world and the spiritual quest leading beyond it ought to be normatively understood. The cosmological relationship between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa,* the question of whether the paradigmatic ideal of the Buddhist spiritual quest is best reflected in the models of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva ("enlightened being") or the Sthaviravādin *arahant,* respectively, and consequently how the nature of buddhahood should be understood, each became issues that resulted in lively argumentations and alternative understandings. In advancing their perspectives, the followers of Mahāyāna articulated a new corpus of elaborate Sanskrit *sūtra*s within which their views were forcefully and elegantly asserted. Here, the Hīnayāna (including the Sthaviravādin) views of *arahant*ship

and *nibbāna* were ridiculed as limited and unenlightened. One of the most important fundamental assumptions of these Mahāyāna *sūtra*s is that the true *dharma* is continuously manifest to the world through the transmundane presence of the Buddha. This notion eventually developed into the concept of "buddha nature" so intrinsic to the later Mahāyāna traditions of China and Japan, especially Zen.

A critical study of the various *sūtra*s and schools of Mahāyāna thought and practice in comparison to Theravāda is a major undertaking and not the focus of this chapter. For now, it is enough to indicate specifically that Avalokiteśvara eventually became the most popular embodiment of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva ideal: a spiritually perfected being who attains enlightenment yet eschews, out of compassion, his own experience of *nirvāṇa* until all sentient beings are assured of the same destiny. Avalokiteśvara came to symbolize the bodhisattva ethic of working tirelessly and selflessly to realize this assurance. Unlike the thoroughly anthropocentric Theravāda religious soteriology of self-discipline, the more popular orientations of Mahāyāna became very much religions of grace wherein devotees, lay or monastic, cultivated confidence in the power of the bodhisattva to assist them in gaining the religious summum bonum.

In the first part of this background chapter, we shall examine the emergence of Avalokiteśvara within the context of more fully developed Mahāyāna schools of thought in India. It is necessary to outline Avalokiteśvara's profile in Buddhist Sanskrit literature first if we are to fully grasp the significance of his assimilation and transformation within the context of Sinhala Buddhism in Sri Lanka. In the second part of this chapter, we will then examine the antecedent Theravāda concept of the bodhisattva in Sri Lanka in relation to the ideals of Sinhala kingship, both of which were also instrumental in preparing the ground for Avalokiteśvara's assimilation. In the process, we will review scholarly findings regarding the presence of Mahāyāna in the classical Anuradhapura civilization of Sri Lanka.

Avalokiteśvara in Early Buddhist Sanskrit Literature

It is not much of an exaggeration to assert that religious veneration of Avalokiteśvara became the "Cult of Half Asia" [Tay, 1976: 147], for iconographic evidence of the widespread popularity of this great Mahāyāna bodhisattva has been found in virtually every corner of Buddhist Asia: from the Hindu Kush in central Asia throughout the subcontinents of South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Tibet), Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Kampuchea, Thailand, and Burma), and east Asia

(China, Mongolia, Korea, and Japan). As Bodhisattva Kannon, Avalokiteśvara remains a very important supernatural figure in modern Japanese religious culture even today. Among traditional Chinese, Avalokiteśvara is Kuan Yin, the compassionate bodhisattva/goddess of mercy. For the Tibetans, the Dalai Lama is still regarded as his contemporary incarnation. While the cult of this bodhisattva remains impressive even today, veneration of Avalokiteśvara in modern Asian societies is but a small fragment of his once even greater multivalence.

In comparison with the massive number of icons found throughout Buddhist Asia and the manifold ways in which this bodhisattva was accorded great spiritual (and temporal) importance within respective Asian cultures historically, it is surprising to find that the amount of religious literature dedicated to the description of Avalokiteśvara is relatively limited. To be sure, many short Sanskrit tracts (now reconstructed from the Tibetan), mainly containing *dhāraṇīs* for the purpose of invoking the power of the bodhisattva to eradicate "sins" or to cure physical diseases,[3] were composed for the benefit of his propitiation. But these texts contain few myths characterizing the bodhisattva's "personality" or "cultic character." The fact that so many images of Avalokiteśvara were created and yet the amount of narrative literature relative to his "character" and "history" is comparatively scant may indicate that while Avalokiteśvara is known to have attracted a number of Mahāyāna monastic devotees, particularly as an object of concentrated meditation, the great popularity of his cult among the laity occurred historically in a period later than the time in which most Mahāyāna literary traditions were becoming fixed. Schopen [1987], in discussing the fifth-century northern Indian Buddhist community at Mathurā at the time Mahāyāna seems to have become prevalent, says:

> The changes at Mathurā were manifested—as they were elsewhere—by the appearance of Avalokiteśvara as a cult figure, by a decided drop in the number of lay donors—particularly women—and a corresponding rise in monk donors, by the sudden appearance of a specific group of monks who called themselves *śākyabhikṣus*, and by the appearance of a very specific and characteristic donative formula [116].

If Schopen is right, his epigraphic evidence points to a fifth-century A.D. origin of the cult of Avalokiteśvara in particular and the emergence of the full-fledged Mahāyāna in general among a specific segment of the *sangha*. References to Avalokiteśvara in Sanskrit literature generally held to be earlier historically, however, seem to anticipate some of the fundamental motifs that were later part and parcel of the more developed bodhisattva cult among the laity as well as the monks in India. This is not to argue that a practicing cult of Avalokiteśvara existed earlier than the fifth century A.D. It is only to point out

that literary references, most of which do not refer to a cultic context, appear as early as the translation of important Mahāyāna *sūtra*s from the Sanskrit into Chinese in the second and third centuries A.D.

Buddhologists have not agreed upon a single interpretation of the bodhisattva's name.[4] Indeed, the scholarly argument regarding the meaning of the Sanskrit term *avalokiteśvara* is itself a lesson in philological frustration. Separately, the Sanskrit terms *avalokita* and *īśvara*[5] are rather clear, meaning "glance" or "look" and "lord," respectively. But when compounded to form *avalokiteśvara,* the name of the bodhisattva has been taken to variously mean "Lord of what we see," "Lord who is seen," "Lord who is seen (from on high)," "Lord who sees," "Lord who sees (from on high)" [Dayal, 1970: 47], and "the Lord who observes (the sounds of) the world" [Hurvitz, 1976]. S. K. Nanayakara [1967] has pointed out that most of these interpretations derive almost wholly from etymological and grammatical considerations, and do not seem to take into account fully the cultic significance of the bodhisattva. Unfortunately, there is little surviving literary evidence for Nanayakara to reconstruct Avalokiteśvara's early cultic orientations. Following Monier-Williams, Nanayakara precedes strictly in philological fashion and explains that *avalokita* is the past participle passive of the verb *avalokayati,* but that it is not uncommon in Sanskrit for such participles to take on an active meaning. Therefore, he says: "The Sanskrit root *lok,* to see, with the prefix *ava*—, could have the meaning, 'to look out upon', or 'survey'. Thus, the two terms, *avalokita* and *īśvara,* when compounded, may be taken to mean, 'Lord who surveys' " [408–9]. Nanayakara's translation makes sense when it is considered within the context of the two *Avalokita Sūtra*s of the Lokottara Mahāsaṃghika *Mahāvastu,* which, although innocent of the fully developed Mahāyāna bodhisattva notion per se, contain the seed of concepts later associated with Avalokiteśvara.[6] The first *Avalokita Sūtra* is fundamentally a sermon about how the Buddha conquered Māra (the personification of death). Nanda, a celestial *deva* (divinity), requests the Buddha to preach this sermon for the benefit and well-being of both *deva*s and men alike. The key to the title of the *sūtra* lies in a twice-repeated passage translated by Jones [1956] as follows:

> When, monks, the Bodhisattva from this shore *surveys* the shore beyond, the antecedent conditions of the survey being actually present, devas who have great power worship the Tathāgata with the highest worship and honour him with highest honour, while the Śuddhavāsa devas get these eighteen grounds for rejoicing [vol. 2: 245; emphasis mine].

The second *sūtra* (with the same title) is far more thoroughly developed and therefore contains a much richer source of symbolism. The key to its title comes at the beginning of the text when a monk named Viśuddhimati says to

the Buddha: "Let the Exalted One disclose what he saw, when as a bodhisattva, he had come to the bodhi tree and stood on the bodhi throne and for the benefit and welfare of the whole world, made his *survey*" [vol. 2: 274; emphasis mine]. In a footnote to this passage, Jones argues that the use of the term *avalokitaṃ* here, which he has translated as "survey," was subsequently incorporated into the name of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara [Jones, vol. 2: 274, n. 7].

Even more interesting, however, is the rich symbolism of light and white that is continuously juxtaposed to dark and black throughout parts of the rest of the *sūtra*. There are numerous references to the Buddha as "the light of the world" (*lokapradyota*) smiting the "son of darkness" (*kṛṣṇabandhu*), "striding throughout the world as a king of swans," "pure as a blooming flower," "lighting up the world as the sun lights up the sky," and "bright like the moon during the month of Kārttika" [Jones, vol. 2: 275]. And a key description of the Buddha as a bodhisattva offered by Māra's son to Māra seems to prefigure the later developed character of Avalokiteśvara:

> When this peerless, virtuous man was born, the earth with its rocks shook six times. The ten quarters of the world were all lit up. Celestial musical instruments gave forth music without anyone playing them.
>
> Devas held up celestial sun-shades, and the Buddha-field was overspread with banners and flags. Throngs of gods and hosts of devas waved their garments. Noble men became alert.
>
> *He will become the eye of the whole world, a light dispelling darkness.* He will scatter the darkness of those who are in misery. Do not in thy feeble understanding, nurture distrust for him.
>
> For he will become a shelter for the whole world, a protection, an island, a refuge and a rest. Those men and devas who put not their trust in him pass to the terrible hells of Avīci.
>
> He is without a peer in the world, worthy of offerings. He is ever beneficent and *compassionate* to the world. When all men and women realize this they will become blessed here in all the world.
>
> But he who nurtures a mind distrustful of him who is endowed with merit, who has shed his passions, the Śākyan lion, verily, there will be no prosperous state for him [vol. 2: 277; emphases mine].

This passage is remarkable not only because of its apparent anticipation of a number of salient motifs later attributed to Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara but also because of its radical insistence upon the importance of faith for devotees who find themselves in states of peril. Here, the Buddha is regarded clearly as a compassionate savior figure in whom all must cultivate confidence to have hope for spiritual progress in future rebirths. This is clearly not the Theravāda soteriological conception of the Buddha, the Buddha who passes into *nibbāna*

beyond the realms of *saṃsāra*. Rather, it may be the "proto-Mahāyāna" view with its emphasis on the ever-compassionate bodhisattva figure set on rescuing the devoted from the conditions of suffering. There is also a caveat in this passage expressed for those without confidence in the Buddha. That such a passage would be conceived by the Lokottara Mahāsaṃghikas and incorporated into their canonical text is an indication of the extent to which their transcendental view of the Buddha, in opposition to the more historical view of Gotama the Buddha as a paradigmatic teacher and monk (the view prevalent among their rivals, the Sthaviravādins), had become thoroughly rooted in their "buddhology" by this early time.

Given the fact that these two *sūtra*s are regarded by some scholars as interpolations, it cannot be determined with much certainty whether or not they anticipate, are contemporary with, or perhaps even follow the earliest direct Mahāyāna textual references to Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in the *Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha, Amitāyurdhyāna,* and *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (*Lotus*) *sūtra*s. Bhattacharyya [1924: 143] is firmly convinced that the *Avalokita sūtra*s of the Mahāsaṃghika *Mahāvastu* date from the third century B.C. and thus anticipate these early Mahāyāna *sūtra*s by some 5 centuries. Bhattacharyya's dating is somewhat bold. But, in any case, these early Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, especially the *Sukhāvatīvyūha* and the *Amitāyurdhyāna,* do contain a wealth of highly developed light symbolism connected to the emerging celestial Buddha Amitābha and his attendant bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, textual motifs that may indeed indicate an elaboration of the themes expressed earlier within the *Mahāvastu.*

The larger *Sukhāvatīvyūha,* which was translated from Sanskrit into Chinese for the first time in the second century A.D., contains the earliest direct literary reference to Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. The following passages, translated by Max Müller into English in 1894 [reprinted in 1969], while somewhat vague and without great detail, clearly continue the play to the symbolism of light and emphasize the compassionate nature of the bodhisattva. In the first passage, Avalokiteśvara seems to project what eventually becomes his own developed character onto Amitābha:

> There rises the Buddha-son, he indeed the mighty Avalokiteśvara, and says: "What is the reason there, O Bhagavat [Amitābha], what is the cause that thou smilest, O lord of the World?"
>
> "Explain this, for thou knowest the sense, and art full of kind compassion, the deliverer of many living beings. All beings will be filled with joyful thoughts, when they have thus heard this excellent and delightful speech."
>
> "And the Bodhisattvas who have come from many worlds to Sukhāvatī, in order to see the Buddha, having heard it and having perceived the great joy, will quickly inspect this country."

> "And beings come to this noble country, (quickly) obtain miraculous power, divine eye and divine ear, they remember their former births and know the highest wisdom" [48–49; brackets mine].

Amitābha then responds by saying that Avalokiteśvara's depiction of what happens to beings who come to his "buddha country" corresponds precisely to his own prayer for their well-being.

> "[if] beings having in any way whatever hear my name [they] should forever go to my country.
>
> "And this my excellent prayer has been fulfilled, and beings have quickly come here from many worlds into my presence, never return from here, not even for one birth" [48–49; brackets mine].

Śākyamuni Gautama the Buddha, who is preaching this sermon, then proceeds to describe the glories of Amitābha's *Sukhāvatī* replete with its luminous resplendence and great numbers of *śrāvakas* ("voice hearers") and bodhisattvas, both of whom possess fathomless light due to their overcoming the "diseases" of the senses and their consequent attainment of the highest knowledge. The text goes on to relate that this wondrous celestial buddha field has been created through the *karm*ic power of Buddha Amitābha with the intention of providing a refuge conducive to attaining the highest spiritual state. Specifically, Śākyamuni Buddha refers to two bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, who, having been previously born into the world of this Buddha (Gautama), have been now reborn into the splendid realm of Sukhāvatī to assist Amitābha in his compassionate spiritual biddings [Rhys Davids, 52].

Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta are repeatedly referred to in the *Amitāyurdhyāna sūtra,* which was translated from Sanskrit into Chinese in the third century A.D. The specific manner in which they assist Buddha Amitābha in saving the faithful becomes more clearly evident in this text. In each of the grades of prescribed visionary meditative attainments described within the *sūtra,* which in turn are correlated with degrees of spiritual progress, both bodhisattvas are said to appear to devotees alongside Amitābha (Avalokiteśvara to the left and Mahāsthāmaprāpta to the right) in order to preach the further truth of *dharma* after the devotee has successfully completed the prescribed meditation at hand. The nature of the sermon that they preach corresponds to the level of understanding attained by the devotee in his just-completed meditation. Thus, the two bodhisattvas are perceived as revealers of deeper *dharm*ic truths and instruments of *upāya,* the ability of the buddhas and bodhisattvas to preach truth at appropriate levels of understanding for their devotees. That is, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta appear to complete the truth of *dharma.*

There is one particular section of the *Amitāyurdhyāna* that specifically advocates concentrated meditation upon Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara per se and contains a long description of the bodhisattva, one part of which later becomes iconographically normative. J. Takakusu [1969] has translated the relevant passage as follows:

> When you have seen Buddha Amitāyus distinctly, you should then further meditate upon Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, whose height is eight hundred thousands of niyutas of yojanas, the colour of his body is purple, his head has a turban (uṣṇīṣaśiraskatā), at the back of which is a halo; (the circumference of) his face is a hundred thousand yojanas. In that halo, there are five hundred Buddhas miraculously transformed just like those of Śākyamuni Buddha, each transformed Buddha is attended by five hundred transformed Bodhisattvas who are also attended by numberless gods.
>
> Within the circle of light emanating from his whole body, appear illuminated the various forms and marks of all beings that live in the five paths of existence (Men, gods, hell, the departed spirits, the brute creation).
>
> On top of his head is a heavenly crown of gems like those fastened (on Indra's head), in which crown there is a transformed Buddha standing, twenty-five yojanas high.
>
> The face of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is like Jāmbūnada gold in colour.
>
> The soft hair between the eyebrows has the colour of the seven jewels, from which eighty-four kinds of rays flow out, each ray has innumerable transformed Buddhas, each of whom is attended by numberless transformed Bodhisattvas; freely changing their manifestations they fill up the worlds of the ten quarters; (their appearance) can be compared with the colour of the real lotus-flower.
>
> (He wears) a garland consisting of eighty-thousand rays, in which is seen fully reflected a state of perfect beauty. The palm of his hand has a mixed colour of five thousand lotus-flowers. His hands have ten (tips of) fingers, each tip has eighty-four thousand pictures, which are like signet-marks, each picture has eighty-four thousand rays which are soft and mild and shine over all things that exist. With these jewel hands, he draws and embraces all beings. When he lifts up his feet, the soles of his feet are seen to be marked with a wheel of a thousand spokes (one of the thirty-two signs) which miraculously transform themselves into five hundred million pillars of rays. When he puts his feet down to the ground, the flowers of diamonds and jewels are scattered about, and all things are simply covered by them. All the other signs of his body and the minor marks of excellence are perfect, and not at all different from those of Buddha, except the signs of having the turban on his head and the top of his head invisible, which two signs of him are the real form and body of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, and it is the Tenth Meditation.
>
> Buddha, especially addressing Ānanda, said: "Whosoever wishes to meditate on Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, must do so in the way I have explained. Those who practise this meditation will not suffer any calamity; they will utterly

> remove the obstacle that is raised by Karma, and will expiate the sins which would involve them in births and deaths for numberless kalpas. Even the hearing of the name of this Bodhisattva will enable one to obtain immeasurable happiness. How much more will the diligent contemplation of him!
>
> "Whosoever will meditate on Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara should first meditate on the turban of his head, and then on his heavenly crown.
>
> "All the other signs should be meditated on, according to their order, and they should be clear and distinct just as one sees the palms of one's hands" [181–84; parentheses translator's].

The full significance of this passage for Mahāyāna and later Vajrayāna cosmology and metaphysics will be seen soon, but now I simply want to highlight how the turban and crown of the bodhisattva, within which is found a buddha figure, are so clearly emphasized in this passage. They are not only the distinctive symbolic attribute of the bodhisattva in the iconographic traditions of Sri Lanka but the very object symbolizing buddhahood, which the devotee is called upon to fix his attention during concentrated meditation. This practice is said to eliminate the consequences of previous *karm*ic acts and to protect the devotee from any type of future calamity.

A full chapter is devoted to Avalokiteśvara in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (*Lotus*) *sūtra,* which further emphasized the bodhisattva's response to those who find themselves in states of calamity or in mind-sets unconducive to spiritual progress. The heart of the chapter, as translated by Hurvitz [1976], is contained in the Buddha's declaration to the bodhisattva Inexhaustible Mind:

> Good man, if incalculable hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of living beings suffering pain and torment hear of this bodhisattva He Who Observes the Sounds of the World and single-mindedly call upon his name, the bodhisattva He Who Observes the Sounds of the World shall straightway heed their voices, and all shall gain deliverance [311].

This passage is then followed by a litany, first in prose and then in verse, detailing the manifold ways in which Avalokiteśvara can rescue his devotees: from fire, from drowning in rivers or at sea, from murder, from the "evil eye," from prisons, especially from bandits, and from the three unhealthy mental dispositions (*āsrava*s) of passion, hatred, and delusion that create acts of unhappy *karm*ic retribution. Positively, when women wishing for children call upon his name, their request is granted. Moreover, anyone calling upon Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara's name will gain "the benefit of merits as incalculable and as limitless [as is possible] [Hurvitz, 311–13; brackets mine]. Of specific soteriological significance, Avalokiteśvara assumes any form or body necessary in order to deliver his devotees to salvation, including the bodies of the buddhas, *pratyekabuddha*s (self-enlightened buddhas), *śrāvaka*s,

Brahma-kings, Śakra (Indra—king of the gods), Vaiśravaṇa (Kuvera—demigod of wealth), kings, monks, nuns, householders, officials, *brahmans* (Hindu priests), boys, girls, dragons, and other supernatural beings.[7] In whatever calamity or dire strait his devotees find themselves, he confers the gift of fearlessness [Hurvitz, 314–15]. In a particularly poignant part of a prayer given by the Buddha to be said when being mindful of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, we find the essence of popular Mahāyāna religious devotionalism and the salvific ethos of Avalokiteśvara's cult superbly and succinctly expressed:

> O you of the true gaze, of the pure gaze,
>   Of the gaze of broad and great wisdom,
> Of the compassionate gaze and the gaze of good will!
>   We constantly desire, constantly look up to,
> The spotlessly pure ray of light,
>   The Sun of wisdom that banishes all darkness,
> That can subdue the winds and flames of misfortune
>   And everywhere give bright light to the world [318].

From this remarkably clear passage Avalokiteśvara seems to be understood preeminently as a buddhistic hierophant of compassion and wisdom. It was this particular *Lotus Sūtra* vision of his efficacy and splendor that became the basis for his extremely popular cult in medieval China and Japan. It is clear from these passages that his power was not conceived narrowly, that is, as solely sacred or solely mundane. Affective compassion in this early Buddhist context is uncircumscribed.

In addition to studying the symbolism of Avalokiteśvara within the context of Indian iconography, the French scholar Marie-Therese de Mallman [1948] carefully analyzed, from the perspective of the history of religions, the motifs of light that we have found so vividly expressed in the *Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha*, the *Amitāyurdhyāna*, and the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (*Lotus*) *sūtra*s. She also examined the later *Lokeśvaraśataka*, the *Sādhanamālā*, the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, and the *Karaṇḍavyūha sūtra* (which we shall also consider shortly). Following Renou (who had argued that the Vedic root *RUC* originally conveyed the sense of luminesence and eventually gave rise to the more banal Sanskrit root *LOK*), Mallman surmised that Avalokiteśvara was originally a solar deity derived from Iranian Zoroastrian beginnings. That his original cosmic and soteriological function was to defeat the forces of darkness made him, in turn, supremely capable of accommodating the more worldly role of first becoming a protector from existential dangers of all kinds and then a great Mahāyāna Buddhist savior figure in the moral, cosmic, and natural orders of the universe. It is interesting to note that the eventual Sinhala

assimilation of Avalokiteśvara follows a similar pattern: a great worldly protector (Avalokiteśvara/Nātha) is later identified with a savior figure (Maitreya). According to Mallman [35–82, especially 77–82], Avalokiteśvara was transformed to become, more specifically, a protector of the Buddhist *dharma* and a power dispelling the forces of darkness, ignorance, and irreligion.

For Mallman [86–91], Avalokiteśvara's character, along with Amitābha's and Mahāsthāmaprāpta's, can be identified with other divine trios found in various pantheons throughout the regions of diffused Indo-Aryan and Zoroastrian cultural influence. Amitābha, who represents infinite time and is the primordial spiritual force in the cosmos, has his counterparts in Zeus and Ahura Mazda; Avalokiteśvara, the ever-active and fully determined savior of light and psychopomp, has his counterparts in Apollo, Mithra, Helios, and Hermes; while Mahāsthāmaprāpta, the divine power and insurer of order (akin to the Vedic deity Varuṇa), is equated with Artemis, Heracles, and Ares. And because the earliest images of Avalokiteśvara, according to Mallman, are of a Greco-Roman type found in northwestern India and date approximately to the second-century A.D. reign of the great Greco-Buddhist king Kaniṣka[8] (who was sympathetic to religious influences from the Iranian cultural area), it is possible, says Mallman, to place the historical origins of the Buddhist cult of Avalokiteśvara in this particular cultural region and in this specific era. Later triads and quartets of Mahāyāna Buddhist divinities, specifically (1) Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi (replacing Mahāsthāmaprāpta), (2) Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara, Vajrapāṇi, and Mañjuśrī, and (3) Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara, and Tārā, are all essentially variants of the original divine triad rooted in Zoroastrian cosmology. Collectively, they embody the sacred tripartite quality of existence from the perspective of Mahāyāna Buddhist religious experience.

We have previously noted that Schopen is convinced that the cult of Avalokiteśvara (not to be confused with the earliest literary references) did not arise until the fifth century A.D. Giuseppe Tucci [1948] has also disputed Mallman's thesis that the origins of Avalokiteśvara are to be found in the Iranian Zoroastrian context. In so doing, he minimized Avalokiteśvara's obvious associations with light:

> I think, on the contrary, that if some Iranian elements can be discovered, this influence took place when Avalokiteśvara had already come to existence; in other words, if the eventual Iranian ideas came into contact with Buddhist communities in the Western borderland of the Indian culture, they can hardly have given more than a purely external imprint of their own upon a mythography which already existed. . . . I am of the opinion that Avalokiteśvara is nothing else but the deification of the look of the Buddha, *avalokana* . . . which the Bodhisattva casts from the Tuṣita Heaven upon the suffering world, before

> descending upon it. . . . There is no connection between Avalokiteśvara and light; the luminous element in Avalokiteśvara is not so essential as this act of looking down, except that all epiphanies of gods are announced by or accompanied with *prabhā*, the casting of light all over the world [188–89].

Tucci's criticisms are partially warranted. Given the evidence from the *Mahāvastu,* it would seem that the motif of Avalokiteśvara's compassionate glance was indeed anticipated within early proto-Mahāyāna tradition. But while Tucci may be right in noting that all of the gods are associated with light, luminescence is, in fact, a theme that is consistently and emphatically associated with Avalokiteśvara, much more so than with other Indian gods and Buddhist bodhisattvas, and it is a cardinal motif associated with the bodhisattva as late as fifteenth-century Sinhala literature. Thus, it would seem to be the case that while the impetus for this bodhisattva's emergence lies within early Buddhist tradition, the importance of light symbolism emanating from Iranian sources eventually led to a further enhancement of Avalokiteśvara's mythic image, an image in which motifs of both compassion and light were forcefully combined. Or better, as the Mahāyāna bodhisattva ideal came under the influence of emergent Indo-Iranian conceptions of high divinity, the symbolism of light further complemented the motif of compassion.

Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara as the *Sambhogakāya* in Mahāyāna Metaphysics and Cosmology

Following his emergence within Mahāyāna tradition (a tradition already heavily influenced by contemporary Hindu notions of cosmic divinity), the significance of Avalokiteśvara became far more specified and domesticated in Buddhist thought. A growing cycle of mythic motifs and symbolic attributes was soon grafted. But before addressing the most relevant of these traditions, particularly those myths of ancient origins that have been recast to form a section of the *Avalokiteśvara-Guṇa-Karaṇḍavyūha sūtra,* we need to account more generally for the accommodation of Avalokiteśvara in popular and esoteric Mahāyāna Buddhist thought.

When Avalokiteśvara was identified as a Mahāyāna Buddhist bodhisattva, he became, in Mallman's words, "un candidat à l'Illumination suprême" [98]. That is, the degree of *bodhi,* or awareness/knowledge of reality, that he was said to have attained assured him of eventually becoming a buddha, or a fully enlightened one. Little by little and over many transmigrations, he is said to have acquired vast amounts of merit through his engagement in selfless actions so that his final spiritual estate was forever assured. But rather than

aspiring immediately to that absolute *nirvāṇ*ic realization, like the self-enlightened *pratyekabuddha*s and world-renouncing *arahant*s of the Sthaviravādin tradition, he vowed to take on the pains and sufferings of all sentient beings until each and every one could be assured of absolute emancipation from the perpetual cycle of suffering *saṃsār*ic rebirth. Only then, it is said, would he permit himself to enjoy the final fruit of the spiritual path.

In spite of the fact that he is said to dwell in the abode called *kumārabhūmi* ("the sphere of the prince," representing the 8th of 10 degrees or spheres of perfection; deities in India are frequently represented royally in the height of their youth), all of his actions in this world are performed with utterly perfect detachment, without the slightest reference to self-concern. He is preeminently in this world but not attached to it or conditioned by it. That is, Avalokiteśvara's actions are totally self-transcendent, completely of an empty character, and without the kinds of motivations that generate *karm*ic retributions. (The Sinhalese would categorize these as *lōkōttara.*)

As such a bodhisattva, Avalokiteśvara works tirelessly between the appearances of buddhas in this world (in this *kalpa,* between the time of Śākyamuni Gautama and the future Buddha Maitreya [Bhattacharyya, 1924: 124], yet he, too, manifests all of the physical and spiritual characteristics of a buddha. He is referred to as a bodhisattva *mahāsattva* ("great being") because he is a guide to other aspiring bodhisattvas, is possessed of great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) and loving-kindness (*mahāmaitrī*), is endowed with the 32 marks of the cosmic person (*mahāpuruṣa*), preaches the truth of the *dharma,* and selflessly takes on the suffering of all, unconditionally [Mallman, 99]. But of greater significance to this study, Avalokiteśvara also became known at once as Sangharatna ("jewel of the sangha") and as a *mahāpuruṣa* (one capable of becoming either a buddha or a *cakravartin*). In our consideration of Avalokiteśvara's iconography, we shall see how both ascetic and the royal motifs (the *lōkōttara* and *laukika*) were combined to form the matrix of his attributes. And, as we shall see in our consideration of the *Avalokiteśvara-Guṇa-Karaṇḍavyūha* (hereafter *AGKs*), the mythology of Avalokiteśvara is essentially a phantasmagoric illustration of these very same religious qualities and principles, particularly his actions that demonstrate the altruism of selflessness/emptiness.

Various elements of Avalokiteśvara's "career" and divine functions were further derived from Vedic and *Brāhman*ical sources [Mallman, 100–115]. The creative powers of Brahmā (the "creator god"), the creation of the world by means of the cosmogonic sacrifice of *Puruṣa* (the "primeval person") in *Ṛg Veda* X, 90, and the progenerative actions of Prajāpati seem to have been "borrowed" from the *Brāhman*ical tradition by Buddhists and then apparently attributed to Avalokiteśvara. This is graphically illustrated in the *AGKs*,

where all of social, natural, and supernatural creation is said to have been produced out of the various parts of Avalokiteśvara's body, an action fully comparable to the gods' sacrifice of *Puruṣa* in *Ṛg Veda* X, 90, from which all creation was said to begin.[9] Avalokiteśvara's body, it is said, is so immense that entire worlds exist within each of his pores; from his eyes, the sun and the moon were born; from his forehead, Maheśvara (Śiva); from his heart, Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu); from his shoulders, Brahmā and the other deities; from his teeth, Sarasvatī; from his mouth, the wind (Vāyu); from his feet, the earth; and from his stomach, Varuṇa. This characterization of the bodhisattva would clearly seem to be aimed at Buddhist proselytizing efforts among the devotees of the great Hindu divinities.

For Mahāyāna Buddhist devotees, Avalokiteśvara became not only cosmogonic creator and a bona fide metaphysical first cause from which all other divine beings derive but also a personal lord who responds compassionately to his devoted. Within Mahāyāna metaphysics, he became the embodiment of the *sambhogakāya,* the body of the eternally present buddha realization that is repeatedly manifest and realized in this world. Because he was regarded as the author of the created world, he was also known by the epithet Lokeśvara ("Lord of the World") or Lokanātha ("Protector of the World"). As Siṃhanāda-Lokeśvara, one of the most popular forms of the bodhisattva depicted in the rich Indian traditions of Buddhist iconography, he rules from his *siṃhāsana* ("lion-throne") on top of Mount Potalaka, making known the truth of *dharma* by means of his sonorous voice, which has the effect of curing various physical diseases, especially those that afflict the skin. The essential truth of *dharma* manifest in the *sambhogakāya,* and expressed in the sound of his sonorous voice, is said to be contained in a formula of six syllables (*ṣaḍakṣarī*). This six-syllable *mantra* was used by devotees for meditation or to invoke the power of the bodhisattva's compassion and loving-kindness: *Oṃ maṇi padme hum* (Om, jewel in the lotus!) [Mallman: 107–10].

In addition to Mallman, a number of other scholars [Foucher, 1900; Kern, 1896; Dohanian, 1977] have pointed out the numerous similarities between Śiva and Avalokiteśvara, especially with regard to iconography and symbolism. Indeed, the great rise in popularity of the cult of Śiva (as well as the cult of Viṣṇu) during the early centuries of the Christian Era was largely contemporaneous with that of Avalokiteśvara's so that it is possible to surmise that many of the same religious influences were responsible for the widespread popularity of all three figures. Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Avalokiteśvara all seem to have benefited theologically and cultically from the process of assimilating attributes previously associated with other great divinities. Nevertheless, the consensus is that theological consolidation and attribution in relation to the cult of Śiva were probably antecedent and that later Buddhist borrow-

ings from the cult of Śiva were responsible for the similarities that arose between the two figures. Comparative notes follow.

As Śiva dwells on top of Mount Kailāsa, Avalokiteśvara dwells on his own mountaintop. Both are at once regarded as great ascetics yet at the same time are princely figures. The lotus and the trident are symbols that both frequently carry. The *jaṭāmakuṭa,* the piled and matted hair of an ascetic usually formed into the shape of a royal crown, is found on top of the heads of almost every early medieval sculptural icon representing the two figures. In addition, both are frequently found wearing the skin of an antelope girding their loins, indicating their mastery over the animal world. In the ninth-century A.D. *Lokeśvaraśataka,* Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is even explicitly compared to Śiva [Vajradatta, 1919: 376]. This is not to argue that Mahāyāna bodhisattvas, in this case Avalokiteśvara, are nothing more than Buddhist transformations of Hindu deities. Rather, the bodhisattva cults should be seen as rival movements within the context of an increasingly devotional (*bhakti*) Indian religious ethos. Forms and attributes of Avalokiteśvara may have been inspired by the cult of Śiva, but there remains a distinctive buddhistic ethos to his cult and personality.

Of more religiophilosophical significance are the similarities between the two figures in the development of *tantr*ic religious thought that surfaced spectacularly within both Mahāyāna Buddhist and Hindu contexts in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. Since the earliest iconography of Avalokiteśvara in Sri Lanka dates from this period, it is important for us to inquire into this particular mode of religious thought and to ascertain the place of Avalokiteśvara within it.

The philosophical significance of Avalokiteśvara within the *tantr*ic tradition is best determined by beginning with a description of his place within the Buddhist pantheon as it was depicted in developed Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna metaphysics and then symbolized iconographically. The *Guhyasamāja tantra,* which is possibly the earliest *tantr*ic text (dating perhaps as early as the fourth century A.D. but probably later), states that the *Tathāgatamaṇḍala,* a centrally important cosmogram used for meditation purposes that portrays the metaphysical reality of the universe in its absolute totality, should be formed by representing the five eternal *tathāgata*s (buddhas) or *dhyāni*[10] (objects of meditation) buddhas in the five cardinal directions (north, south, east, west, and center) along with their attendant, emanated *kula*s ("families"). The names of these *kula*s (*Dveṣa:* hatred; *Moha:* delusion; *Cintamaṇi:* "wishing gem"—desire; *Vajrarāga:* passion; and *Samaya:* the process of consolidation) are very revealing, for they represent the basic qualitative mental factors generating *karm*ic retribution and thus the perpetuation of personal condi-

tioned *saṃsāric* existence [Bhattacharyya, 1924: 32]. Each of these must be conquered by the spiritually disciplined devotee through the meditative realization that attachment to them not only leads to suffering, but that they are each inherently empty. Categorically, the five *dhyāni* buddhas also correspond to the basic structures of the psychophysical world in which we dwell: *rūpa* (form), *vedanā* (sensation), *saṃjñā* (name, identity), *saṃskāra* (conformation), and *vijñāna* (consciousness) [Mukhopadhyay, 1985: 12]. Taken together, the five *dhyāni* buddhas are, therefore, symbolic visual representations of the constituent psychophysical nature of existence. But, further, the five *dhyāni* buddhas were also equated with the five basic material elements of existence, the five sense organs, the five objects of the sense organs, the five basic *mudrā*s (movements or gestures), the five basic colors, and the five basic *vahana*s ("vehicles" upon which deities are mounted). These identifications became, then, the basic guides to and principles for Indian Buddhist iconography and painting [Bhattacharyya, 1924: 34–36]. In time, a sixth *dhyāni* buddha, Akṣobhya, was added to represent what was already implicitly understood in this metaphysical system: that all constituents of existence are *śūnyatā* (empty or without substance) and ultimately emanate from the primordial buddha.

The *dhyāni* buddhas were considered atemporal, yet they and their *kula*s were thought to preside in successive order over the cosmos, one after the other. Specifically, Buddha Amitābha is now the eternal *dhyāni* buddha of our universe and Śākyamuni Gautama Siddhartha is regarded as the *mānuṣī* (human) Buddha of our worldly time. As the ultimate source of the *kula*, or the very absolute essence of our world, Amitābha is symbolized by a seated buddha figure embedded in the crowns worn by all emanated deities and bodhisattvas belonging to his "family"; hence, the metaphysical correspondence of Avalokiteśvara's most distinctive attribute in the iconographical traditions of Sri Lanka. But one other figure, in addition to Avalokiteśvara, is of great importance to Amitābha's *kula* and thus for our understanding of the structure and dynamic of *tantric* metaphysics: the *śakti* (the female principle of energy) Pāṇḍarā who consorts with Amitābha, producing divine emanations and ultimately the temporal world.

While Amitābha is considered *pravṛttikarmanā* (the original progenitor of our existence), he is quiescent, eternally in a state of enlightened, uncompounded emptiness. His *śakti*, Pāṇḍarā, however, is the active side of the essential, primordial buddha. When Buddha (Amitābha—enlightened, uncompounded emptiness) unites with his *śakti* (Pāṇḍarā—the female principle of energy), directed power is generated to create, maintain, and destroy the cosmos. Philosophically and metaphysically stated, pure mind (underived)

and energy (the derived will to be) unite to create the differentiated sociomoral and physical world. Again, in the Sinhala context, these principles would correspond functionally and structurally to *lōkōttara* and *laukika*.

Now, this "marriage" and its "offspring" were related in *tantr*ic Buddhist thought to the early Buddhist concept of the *triratna* ("the triple gem"—Buddha, *dharma,* and *sangha*—in whom all Buddhist devotees take spiritual refuge). The union of wisdom (*prajñā*—pure knowledge of the truth of existence known to the pure minds of buddhas) with compassion (*karuṇā*—the primary quality of the driving power of *śakti*) creates *dharma,* the holding, sustaining substance or support, or better: the efficient cause of all phenomenal existence (the way things really are). If the Buddha is thus the underived, enlightened, uncompounded known reality of emptiness, and if the *dharma* (the efficient cause and "suchness" of all phenomena) is the child of the Buddha's embrace of *śakti* (energy), then the *sangha* (normatively understood as the Buddhist monastic community or the third "refuge" upon which devotees rely) is the collective multitudinous phenomenal action that realizes the truth of Buddha and *dharma* in this human world [Mukhopadyhaya: 24–33]. The *sangha* is thus the relative temporal realization of the absolute.

It is precisely at this level of the *sangha* and "offspring" of the primordial divine couple that the actions and "being" of Avalokiteśvara are located. As the *Sangharatna* ("jewel of the sangha") and the active presence/realization of *dharma* produced by Buddha Amitābha and his *śakti* in this world, Avalokiteśvara embodies the temporal realization of the transcendent Buddha-Dharma. Thus, in the Sinhala context, he would be both *lōkōttara* and *laukika*.

These identifications, in turn, were understood in relation to the emerging theory of the "three bodies of the Buddha." Originally, the concept of the body of the Buddha derived from a projection of the historical Gautama's experience of enlightenment onto the nature of all phenomenal existence. That is, the essence of truth, *śūnyatā,* realized by Gautama in his enlightenment experience, was concomitantly conceived in terms of an all-pervading transcendental suchness/emptiness characterizing ultimately all of phenomenal existence, and also in terms of this very truth's conventional, empirical, human realization or, to put this succinctly, the truth as absolute reality and the truth as temporally realized, enlightened experience. The former was known as *Dharmakāya* ("*Dharma* body" of the Buddha), while the latter was known as *Rūpakāya* or *Nirmāṇakāya* (the temporally realized "embodiment" of the Buddha), at least as these were known in the early *Mādhyamika* works of Nāgārjuna. Beyond these conceptions, the *Yogācāra* philosophers Asanga and Vasubhandu added the concept of *sambhogakāya,* a refulgent ("bril-

liant") body, as an intermediary formation of the Buddha's body between the other two: a revelation of *śūnyatā* that is absolutely *multitudinously* present and waiting to be discovered in the conditioned world. Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is identified with just this *sambhogakāya*. That is, he mediates between the *Dharmakāya* and *Rūpakāya*, making possible the "multitudinous" (*sangha*) realization of truth.

It is likely that this metaphysical system was constructed to be in conformity with prevailing Hindu cosmological conceptions. The theory of the *triratna* and the three bodies of the Buddha correspond to the traditional Indian conception of the three realms of the cosmos (celestial, atmospheric, and terrestrial), which were, in turn, taken over by the Buddhists and reformulated to become *arūpaloka* (the world beyond form), *rūpaloka* (the world of form), and *kāmaloka* (the world of desire). *Dharmakāya* and Buddha have a counterpart in *arūpaloka* (the unconditioned, "unformed world" of traditional Indian cosmology and the seat of highest divinity); *rūpakāya* and *dharma* have a counterpart in *kāmaloka* (the sensuous, conditioned human and material "world of desire"); and *sambhogakāya* and *sangha* have a counterpart in the intermediary *rūpaloka* (the "world of form").

Further, there are various affinities between this Buddhist metaphysic and the Hindu Sāṃkhya school of thought, a philosophical worldview upon which both Hindu and Buddhist *tantr*ics seemed to have depended, and one that seemed to have been sympathetically received among religious thinkers of the *tantr*ic Śiva cult. According to Sāṃkhya, the primeval *Puruṣa* ("Person"—in this case Śiva) unites with *Śakti* ("Energy"—the Goddess) to create *Prakṛti* ("Nature"). *Prakṛti* is then conditioned temporally by the interrelation of three primary *guṇa*s (qualities): *sattva* (being), *rajas* (energy, passion, emotion), and *tamas* (form and substance). The various combinations and transformations of these *guṇa*s produce the qualitatively differentiated experience of temporal existence. Mukhopadhyay [43] has constructed a chart that illustrates some of the various structural identifications that can be made between these Hindu and Buddhist conceptions. I have reproduced it in Table 2.1.

In this scenario, Avalokiteśvara is the mediating bodhisattva agent of action for Amitābha and his *śakti*. He is the collectively embodied (*sangha*) energy of enlightenment (*prajña* [wisdom] united with *karuṇā* [compassion]) in their affective states of expression and realization. That is, Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is Buddha and *dharma* in a collectively realized, temporal state of action. Just as the monastic *sangha* was conceived in the earliest Buddhist traditions as the preserver of the Buddha's *dharma* [Holt, 1982a: 139–44], so Avalokiteśvara fulfills this same role on a cosmic and mythic level between the appearance of *mānuṣī* (human) buddhas in this later Mahāyāna context. In Mahāyāna, he is a mediator between ultimate "buddha nature" (*śūnyatā*) and

Table 2.1. Tantric Correspondences in Cosmology

Deities	*Ratnas*	*Kayas*	*Gunas*	*Lokas*
Dhyāni-Buddha and Śakti	Buddha	Dharmakāya	*Sattva*	Arūpadhātu
Dhyāni-Bodhisattva (Avalokiteśvara in various forms)	*Sangha*	Sambhogakāya	*Rajas*	Rūpadhātu
Emanatory deities (other *kula* members)	*Dharma*	Nirmāṇakāya	*Tamas*	Kāmadhatu

its temporal realization. Referring to how this notion of Avalokiteśvara as the embodiment of *sambhogakāya* is best expressed within the context of his identification with the *sangha,* Mukhopadhyay states:

> From a religious point of view, the third member of the Triratna [*sangha*] . . . was the congregation of the faithful, or primitive church, or body of original disciples [of Gautama], or any assemblage of true, monastic observers of the law, past or present. In reality, Avalokiteśvara is an entity of the same kind of assemblage of the true, that is created by his own sire Amitābha for the sake of the latter's creation [37, brackets mine].

The *Sangharatna* ("Jewel of the *Sangha*") in the *Avalokiteśvara-Guṇa-Karaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*

Avalokiteśvara's identifications as the "jewel of the *sangha*" and as the transcendental *sambhogakāya* are best illustrated in the mythic episodes of the Sanskrit *AGKs,* the most developed of all *sūtras* describing Avalokiteśvara. This text dates anywhere from the fourth to the seventh century A.D. [Winternitz, 1927, vol. 2: 306–7].[11]

The *AGKs* begins with a series of typical redactic devolutions opening with a dialogue between a Buddhist monk named Jayaśrī and a king named Jinaśrī in which the king has asked for an explanation of the significance of the *triratna* (Buddha, *dharma,* and *sangha*). Jayaśrī, a famous preacher of the *dharma* at Buddha Gaya (the seat of Gautama's enlightenment experience) says in response that the sermon he is about to preach was originally expounded by Upagupta to King Aśoka when Aśoka had asked the very same question. Upagupta's response to Aśoka was that Gautama the Buddha, who

had conquered Māra (death) through the knowledge he acquired in his enlightenment experience, was a temporal realization of the *Buddharatna,* which, in its totality, consists of the five *dhyāni* buddhas. He says that *prajñā,* or wisdom, is really the "mother of all buddhas" and as such consists of the *Dharmaratna.* The *sangharatna* is made up of those who are "sons of the buddha." All "family members" of the *triratna,* therefore, deserve special veneration by all devotees. Upagupta then proceeded, according to Jayaśrī, to retell a sermon first preached by Śākyamuni Gautama the Buddha to bodhisattvas Maitreya and Suvarṇavaraṇa Viṣkambhu, a sermon meant to illustrate what it means to be one of the "sons of the buddha" and thus how Avalokiteśvara became known as "Sangharatna."

Once while Gautama the Buddha was performing a meditation at the Jetavana monastery in the midst of his disciples and an attendant heavenly throng, a meditation aimed at the "purification of everything," bright golden rays began to appear, lighting up the entire monastery and the surrounding countryside. Viṣkambhu, amazed and filled with great joy, asked the Buddha about the source of these glorious rays of light. The Buddha responded by saying that they came from Ārya Avalokiteśvara, who was preaching the *dharma* of *nirvāṇa* to all the suffering denizens of the tortuous Avīci Hell (dominated by a woeful lake of fire). To an incredulous Viṣkambhu, he continued: as a result of Avalokiteśvara's preaching of the *dharma,* the lake of fire in the Avīci Hell was cooled and turned into a refreshing lotus pond and the sufferings of all of its inhabitants were thereby overcome. This miracle was then reported to Yāma, Lord of Hell, who wondered what deity this might be. Recognizing Avalokiteśvara, Yāma praised his virtues with a long eulogy.

Anxious for Avalokiteśvara's arrival in the human abode, Viṣkambhu eagerly asked the Buddha when he might be expected in this realm. The Buddha replied that Avalokiteśvara had then proceeded to visit *pretaloka,* where the suffering "departed" in the form of hungry and thirsty ghosts heard his sermon on *dharma* in the form of the *AGKs.* Like the "rain of *dharma,*" water flowed from each of his pores to assuage their miserable conditions. The *preta*s were thus disabused of their belief in the permanent self, which had led them to commit *karm*ic actions of greed resulting in their unfavorable rebirths. They were all thus transformed into bodhisattvas to dwell in the world of Amitābha's paradisacal buddha field, Sukhāvati.[12]

The Buddha then proceeded to tell that once, long ago, when he was incarnated as a merchant during the time of the Buddha Vipaśyin, he had heard that former buddha enumerate the many qualities of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. The bodhisattva originally had appeared from a shot of light emanating from the primordial self-existent buddha of the cosmos, who was engaged in his perpetual, deep meditation. From Avalokiteśvara's body (that

of a *mahāpuruṣa*), the world as we know it was created: the sun and the moon from his eyes, Maheśvara from his brow, Brahmā and the other gods from his shoulders, Sarasvatī from his teeth, the wind from his mouth, the earth from his feet, and Varuṇa from his stomach (as above).

Under the earlier *mānuṣī* buddha Śikhin, Avalokiteśvara had been the bodhisattva Dānaśūra who had conveyed the assurance of *dharma* realization from Amitābha to Śikhin in the form of a gift of heavenly flowers.

The Buddha Gautama then continued his sermon by saying that Avalokiteśvara is the most powerful of all bodhisattvas. The litany of praise for him that follows in this portion of the text is rivaled only by the description of Avalokiteśvara in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka.*

According to Gautama, Avalokiteśvara is especially concerned with the damned and the suffering. Preaching wherever he goes, he once traveled to the realms of the *asuras* ("demigods"), the *yakṣas* (animal and vegetation spirits), and the *rakṣas* (demons with the powers to transform their bodies). As a result of his preaching of the *dharma,* some reached "the fruit of entering the stream," some the fruit of the "once-returners," some became *arahants*, while others attained supreme, perfect enlightenment. Ascending the heavens, he taught the noble *ṛṣis* the necessity of compassion. In a preview to the *sūtra*'s longest episode, which we shall examine in detail shortly, he traveled to Sinhaladvīpa ("the island of Sinhala"—Sri Lanka), where he changed himself into the lovely form of Kāma, the god of love, amid the female *rākṣasīs* (monsters who seduce their human prey and then feed on their flesh). Attracted by his lovely appearance, the *rākṣasīs* beseeched him to become their husband. He promised to do so if they did as he commanded, so he expounded the *dharma,* including the four noble truths, the noble eightfold path, the 10 virtuous actions, and the truth of the four *Āgamas* (collections of *sūtras*). As a result, all of the *rākṣasīs* were converted to following the truth of *dharma* and made great progress on the spiritual path to *nirvāṇa.* After converting the *rākṣasīs*, he traveled to Benares, where he assumed the form of a bee and hummed the invocation of the *triratna* so that those beings reborn as insects and worms would revive the memory of the Buddha and his sermons on *dharma.* As a result, these beings were all transformed and became bodhisattvas in Amitābha's Sukhāvati. From Benares, he traveled to Magadha, where a famine and drought had lasted for 20 years. There he brought down showers of rain and food, causing a very old wise man to explain that this was only possible due to the virtues and compassion of Avalokiteśvara. Maheśvara (Śiva) and his consort Umā then came and asked for a prophecy. Avalokiteśvara prophesied that Śiva would become the Buddha Bhasmeśvara ("Lord of the Ashes") and that Umā would eventually become the Buddha Umeśvara.

Having thus established the figure of Avalokiteśvara as the lord of all contingent worlds of the hierarchically arranged Buddhist cosmos, Śākyamuni then told Viṣkambhu that meditation upon Avalokiteśvara is a supremely powerful spiritual practice. Those who know his six-syllable (*ṣaḍakṣarī*) *mantra* will never again wander through the abyss of endless transmigrations in the transient *saṃsāric* worlds. And those who call upon his name will always be rescued from dangers. To illustrate his point, he tells the following story,[13] which merits the detailed account and analysis that follows not only because it is the central narrative event within the entire *sūtra* but because it articulates a mythic tradition precisely about the "career" of Avalokiteśvara in Sri Lanka.

In one of his previous rebirths, Śākyamuni Gautama the Buddha was born as Sinhala, son of Sinha, and a merchant in the capital of Sinhakalpa. After Sinhala led a crew of 500 other merchants on a seagoing venture in search of precious jewels, his ship was taken by storm and wrecked off the coast of the island of Tāmradvīpa (Lanka). By the grace of the lord to whom Sinhala was devoted, the 500 shipwrecked sailors safely reached the shores of the island, where they were warmly embraced by troops of celestial nymphs. In reality, the nymphs were *rākṣasīs* plotting to devour the captain and his men. The "nymphs" feigned shared distress with the merchants, seduced them, and begged them to become their husbands. One night after Sinhala had spent the evening in the arms of his beautiful nymph, the lamp in his room began to laugh. Sinhala asked the lamp the reason for the laughter, and the lamp replied by telling him that a previous group of shipwrecked merchants had been similarly treated by the nymphs but ultimately had been imprisoned and eventually devoured, for the beautiful nymphs in reality were vicious *rākṣasīs* in disguise. The light warned Sinhala that he and his comrades were in imminent danger and that there was only one possible means by which they could be saved. The lighted lamp told Sinhala that on the seashore there stood a white winged horse named Balāha ready to take him and his 500 comrades away to safety, but that no one should open his eyes until he had safely landed on the further shore. Alarmed by the light's revelation, Sinhala quickly assembled his fellow merchants and instructed them in the advice that had been given. They then scurried down to the shore and mounted the waiting Balāha, who then rose majestically into the sky. The *rākṣasīs*, seeing that their prey was escaping, called out in loud lamentations. The merchants, all except Sinhala, were touched with both pity and desire, opened their eyes to look back, and dropped back down into the ocean, where they were immediately devoured. Sinhala alone escaped and, after landing on the shore, went back to his father's house in Sinhakalpa.

Soon, however, the *rākṣasī* who had become his lover and "wife" on Tāmradvīpa appeared at his house in all of her bewitching beauty and appealed

to Sinhala's father by complaining that Sinhala had married her but had now forsaken her. Sinhala, however, succeeded in convincing his father of the real truth. But the *rākṣasī* proceeded to gain an audience with the king of the country to proffer her complaint. The king was not only convinced by her tale but was so enamored with her beauty that, after asking Sinhala if he still refused the woman, took her as his own queen. In time, the new queen arranged to bring her *rākṣasī* companions from Tāmradvīpa to live in the palace of the king. In short time, they plotted and succeeded in devouring the king and his family. With this turn of events, Sinhala intervened and explained to the people of the country why the king and his family had disappeared. The people unanimously proclaimed Sinhala as their new king, while Sinhala took a vow to defeat the *rākṣasīs* in order to assure that the *triratna* would be spread throughout the kingdom. The *rākṣasīs* were then banished to the forest. As a result of this outcome, the country was saved and Tāmradvīpa was renamed Sinhaladvīpa.

As a postscript to the story Śākyamuni explained to Viṣkambhu that he was the merchant Sinhala and that Avalokiteśvara was the horse named Balāha.[14]

Commenting upon this, the lengthiest and most significant of episodes in the *AGKs*, Bournouf made the following statement in 1844:

> Cette partie de l'ouvrage . . . est de beaucoup supérieure au reste, mais le fond en appartient à d'autres legendes buddhiques; et je n'ai pas besoin d'appeler l'attention des lecteurs auxquels sont familiers les contes orientaux, sur les ogresses et le cheval merveilleux, fictions déjà connues en Europe et tres-frequemment racontrees par les rédacteurs des legendes [224].
>
> This section of the text . . . is far superior to the rest, which is background belonging to other Buddhist legends; and I do not need to call attention to readers who are familiar with oriental literature stories about the ogress and the marvelous horse, tales already known in Europe and frequently related by story writers.

Moreover, it does not take much imagination to recognize here the general outline of the story of "Sinbad the Sailor" from *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights* or the theme of trust from the Old Testament story of Lot and his wife at Sodom and Gomorrah, for the story of Sinhala is a variant of one of the most popular of all South Asian stories frequently told in that part of the world.[15] Its dissemination throughout the ancient Asian world is easily illustrated. It is also obvious that its major motif (conquering the *rākṣasīs* of Lanka) is also found in the great Indian epic *Rāmāyaṇa* as well as in the Pāli chronicles of Sinhalese Theravāda Buddhism. In those sources, Rāma and the Buddha, two exemplars of *dharma* par excellence, defeat the hostile powers of chaos and irreligion and in the process respectively establish, uphold,

preach, or illustrate the truth of *dharma*. Furthermore, this is not the only Buddhist version of this particular recension of the tale per se; very close facsimiles are found as the brief Theravāda Pāli *Valāhassa Jātaka* [Cowell, 1895, vol. 2: 127ff.] and the extensive "Five Hundred Merchants" in the Lokottara Mahāsaṃghika *Mahāvastu* [Jones, vol. 2: 70–92] wherein Gautama identifies himself as the white winged steed of salvation.

Aside from entertainment, the story of Sinhala, of course, may be read on many different levels and from a variety of angles. On one of the most general levels, inclusive of a consideration of its general outline as expressed in the *Rāmāyana* and the *vaṃsa* literature of Sri Lanka, it is a story about how the forces against *dharma* are encountered and defeated. (It is interesting to note that in each of these sources, Lanka is originally identified as an island inhabited by the wild forces of chaos and doom, a theme that has persisted in popular Indian culture even to this day.) But more germane to our inquiry is why the story has been adopted to illustrate the virtues of Mahāyāna Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara as the "jewel of the *sangha.*"

The allegorical symbolism of 500 merchants setting off on a sea voyage in search of precious jewels is almost too obvious to explicate in a Buddhist context. Five hundred is a number used frequently in Buddhist texts, Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna alike, to designate the presence of immediate disciples surrounding the Buddha. Sinhala and his 500 comrades searching for jewels represent the Buddha (the culture hero of the Sinhalese people) and the *sangha* seeking full realization of the *triratna*. That a previous group of 500 merchants succumbed to the *rākṣasīs* may be an indirect Mahāyāna indictment of the "failures" of the Sthaviravādin or Hīnayāna *sangha*. The new group of 500 led by the protagonist Sinhala, is, of course, the Mahāyāna *sangha*. The *rākṣasīs* represent their obstacles: the forces of *saṃsāra* that first seduce one by means of desire and lust before leading one down the path to being eventually consumed by them. But Sinhala (the Buddha) discovers by the help of a light (Avalokiteśvara—the revealer of the truth of *dharma*) the means by which the clutches of desire (*saṃsāra*) can be transcended. This means is the saving, aerial (transcendent, mediating *sambhogakāya*) power of Balāha (Avalokiteśvara) that ferries one to the safety of the shore beyond (*nirvāṇa* or *Sukhāvatī*) the ocean (*saṃsāra*). It is a power that not only saves one from the realm of desire (Lanka: *saṃsāra*) but one that transforms *saṃsāra* itself. Thus, Tāmradvīpa (the "island of copper" and the home of *rākṣasīs*; *saṃsāra*) is renamed Sinhaladvīpa (the "island of Sinhala") to reflect its new rule by the true *dharma*, a development in the story that might indicate the Mahāyāna redactor of the text was aware of the Sinhala people (in this case, Mahāyāna Buddhist Sinhalese) living in Lanka at that time.

Be that as it may, the story is particularly appropriate to Avalokiteśvara, for

(1) it once again expresses the victorious power of white/light over the forces of darkness (the *rākṣasīs*, who, from the earliest of Indian Aryan times, have been associated with the malfeasance of the night) [Parker, 1984: 3–6]; and (2) it articulates the Mahāyāna notion that in order to reach the further shore of *nirvāṇa,* one must rely upon the *sambhogakāya* power of a saving bodhisattva.

In this root myth, then, Avalokiteśvara is unmistakably identified as the "jewel of the *sangha,*" the power that rescues and preserves the forces of *dharma* here personified by an incarnation of Gautama (the Buddha). Avalokiteśvara's role as the intermediary transcendent *samghogakāya* is also aptly portrayed. He makes possible the establishment of Buddha and the *dharma* as the truths that lead simultaneously to a transcendence of suffering and a grounding of righteous rule in this world. With regard to the latter, it is only through Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara's intervention that the *triratna* is established as the principle of rule diffused throughout Sinhala's kingdom, and his role vis-à-vis Gautama once again asserts his supreme efficacy as a *dhyāni* bodhisattva.

In Buddhist Sanskrit literature, then, Avalokiteśvara is the *dhyāni* bodhisattva embodying the Buddhist valorization of compassion. It is his exercise of this compassion that makes him the *sangharatna.* As the *sambhogakāya,* he surveys the world and responds to those who yearn for an escape from the suffering of *saṃsāra.* From the Sinhala point of view, this is his *lōkōttara* aspect.

By the eighth century, icons of Avalokiteśvara were present in Sri Lanka and, as we shall see in Chapter 3, there is evidence indicating that he was by then a popular object of veneration among coastal seafaring communities. Fa Hien, the earlier fifth-century itinerant Chinese pilgrim, is also known to have called upon Avalokiteśvara in desperation when his ship encountered a terrible storm off the coast of Sri Lanka. From the eighth through the tenth centuries, as we shall see in later chapters, Avalokiteśvara was also propitiated within some of the monasteries at the Anuradhapura capital, and the Mahāyāna cosmology and soteriology associated with his cult appear to have enjoyed a concerted following. It is within this context that the presence of his cult may have made a direct impact on classical conceptions of Sinhalese kingship and bodhisattvahood. However, the particular forms of "*maṇḍala* polity" historically associated with the cult of the bodhisattva that developed during this time and later in insular and peninsula Southeast Asia[16] were not fully adopted by the Sinhalese until the times of the Gampola and Kandyan kings, a development also examined in later chapters. That is, recognition of Avalokiteśvara's *laukika* aspect, and hence his full assimilation into Sinhala Buddhism under the soteriological umbrella of Theravāda, occurs only after

several centuries during which the Mahāyāna seems to have thrived in its own right. It is to the early Sri Lankan context that we will now turn our attention, specifically the manner in which Theravāda conceptions of kingship and bodhisattvahood made possible the eventual incorporation of Avalokiteśvara.

The Bodhisattva Concept in Theravāda Thought and Sri Lankan Political Culture

Before Avalokiteśvara was venerated on the island as a Mahāyāna bodhisattva and *tantr*ic deity, a conception of the bodhisattva figure in Theravāda tradition had also been developing for several centuries. As we shall see, there are at least three contexts in which the bodhisattva conception in Sinhala Buddhism has been expressed: (1) as the life of the royal prince Siddhartha, including his previous lives (especially his last rebirth as Prince Vessantara) before the enlightenment experience in which he became Gotama the Buddha; (2) as future Buddha Metteyya, particularly as he is portrayed as a bodhisattva (in the future kingdom of Ketumatī) in the *Anāgatavaṃsa Desanā;* and (3) in the traditional Sinhala belief that a righteous and powerful Buddhist king could become a bodhisattva on the path to *nibbāna*. All three have become interrelated at times: pious kings aspired to become Metteyya, whose buddhahood was modeled on Gotama's. Avalokiteśvara was eventually associated with royal religion and the cult of the future Metteyya (Sanskrit: Maitreya).

In Theravāda tradition, the bodhisattva conception is quite limited in scope when compared with the Mahāyāna profile described in relation to Avalokiteśvara earlier. In the Theravāda vision of the cosmos, transcendent bodhisattvas do not dominate a vast supernatural pantheon as great savior figures, nor is the spiritual path of the bodhisattva understood as the ultimate means of realizing the absolute truth of *dhamma*. The path of the bodhisattva is understood, at best, as an advanced phase of spiritual fruition. It is therefore a conception that became more relevant to aspiring religious laity (especially kings) than to members of the Theravāda monastic community for whom the path of the *arahant* remained the soteriological model.

In modern Sri Lanka, especially at the village level, the bodhisattva conception is most frequently articulated in relation to the previous lives of the historical Buddha before his final rebirth as Gotama. In fact, the *jātaka* stories are probably the most familiar religious literature among Sinhala laity in general. *Bhikkhu*s often used them as pericopes on *pōya* days during the monthly full-moon observances. During Vesak (May) and Poson (June) *pōya*-day celebrations, *jātaka*s are often colorfully illustrated in *pandal*s (hexagonal or octagonal panels of framed, almost cartooned, pictures encircled by varie-

gated flashing electric bulbs forming a rather spectacular marketplace display). And, more traditionally, they are frequently the subject of temple wall paintings, particularly in *vihāraya* (monastery) *dhamma* (sermon) halls. Moreover, the *jātaka*s form the most important part of the curriculum in a child's Buddhist education by articulating the moral values perfected by the Buddha paradigmatically in his own previous incarnations. Children are taught that by perfecting these same virtues (*pāramitā*s), exemplified by the Buddha's actions in tales of his previous rebirths, they too can eventually gain a favorable rebirth of their own wherein spiritual perfection can be ultimately attained.

What the *jātaka*s portray especially is the aspiring bodhisattva, life after life, perfecting one virtue after another until he has reached his penultimate rebirth as Prince Vessantara. In this best known and loved of all the *jātaka*s, Gotama, as a bodhisattva-king, finally sacrifices his kingdom for the well-being of his subjects. The *Vessantara jātaka* is usually recited at the time of *sangha* ordination ceremonies to illustrate the qualities of sacrifice and selfless giving required of the renouncing *bhikkhu*.[17] The central importance of the *Vessantara jātaka* to late Sinhala royalty is evident at many *vihāra*s constructed during the later phases of the Kandyan kingdom. Beautiful mural paintings depicting the primary events of this *jātaka* adorn the walls of many of these temples constructed or remodeled by the last Kandyan kings (especially Kīrtti Śrī Rājasinha) from the eighteenth century.[18] These paintings, however, represent only the tail end of a long Theravāda tradition associating kings with the bodhisattva spiritual model.

In fact, the tradition of associating bodhisattvahood with kingship is clearly referred to within early Pāli biographical accounts of the life of Gotama, wherein Siddhartha is portrayed as has having been born as a prince into the royal Śākyan clan. Endowed with the 32 signs of a *mahāpuruṣa* at birth, Gotama was prophesied to become either a buddha or a *cakkavatti*. (As pointed out in the introduction, Gotama had the potential to be a buddha or a great king.) According to Theravāda tradition, Gotama's decision to renounce royalty in favor of buddhahood is a clear sign of monastic spiritual supremacy over the life of a religious sovereign. It is a kind of Buddhist reversal to the superior spiritual status claimed by *brahmans* vis-à-vis the *kṣatryan* political and military vocation in classical Hindu society. It also anticipates the later Theravāda claim that attaining the status of an *arahant* is a more superior spiritual achievement than completing the path of the bodhisattva. For Theravādins, with rare exception, it is necessary for all spiritual pursuants to enter the *sangha* as *bhikkhu*s in order to experience the ultimate religious experience of enlightenment as an *arahant*, an illuminative attainment that puts an end to *saṃsāri*c rebirths. Because bodhisattvas remain actively en-

gaged in this world and have temporarily eschewed the final liberating experience, they have reached, according to Theravāda apologists, but a penultimate attainment prerequisite to the final fruition of the monastic path: *nibbāna*. Hence, Gotama is referred to as a bodhisattva before his final decision to seek the absolute truth and his consequent experience of enlightenment that made him Buddha.

However, Theravāda tradition also recognizes the future attainment of buddhahood by Metteyya, whose appearance at the end of this current *kalpa* (world cycle), it is traditionally believed, will usher in a time in which conditions for the attainment of *nibbāna* will be ideal for all devout Buddhists. Indeed, the wish to be reborn in Metteyya's time and in *cakkavatti* Sanka's kingdom of Ketumatī is comparable to the Mahāyāna desire to be reborn in Amitābha's Sukhāvatī and has long been an intrinsic part of lay Buddhist aspirations in Sri Lanka. Theravāda religious visions of Bodhisattva Metteyya's appearance in the future represent a projected spiritual hope that the devout and the faithful will eventually experience the great spiritual benefits of their *karm*ically fortuitous actions.[19] As we shall see, Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, transfigured into the Sinhala guardian deity Nātha in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, has been identified with Metteyya in emergent modern Sinhala Buddhist tradition. But for now, we only want to stress that religious belief in the future attainment of buddhahood by Bodhisattva Metteyya is a rare Theravāda allusion to the spiritual-cosmic significance of bodhisattvas. It is an allusion, however, that is very ancient and one that assumed increasing importance in the development of kingship in Sinhala polity.

The first specific references to Bodhisattva Metteyya in Sinhala Buddhism (apart from the prophecy of Gotama regarding Metteyya's future appearance in the canonical Pāli *Dīgha Nikāya*)[20] are found in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* and in the *Mahāvaṃsa*, both texts dating to approximately the fifth century A.D. The *Mahāvaṃsa*'s reference occurs in its concluding pages, which contain an account of the great king Duṭṭhagāmaṇī (Sinhala: Duṭugämunu; second century B.C.) whose kingship consolidated disparate Sinhala regional rulers under one banner and added a new dimension to the Aśokan paradigm of Buddhist monarchy.

Despite Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's blatantly "unbuddhistic" actions (which included the slaying of the righteous Tamil king Elāra in a personal duel to the finish, his enlistment of Buddhist *bhikkhu*s within his armed retinue to insure military victory, and his use of a relic of the Buddha as an emblem of war), Duṭṭhagāmaṇī is widely regarded as the greatest of all Sinhala kings. It is not inaccurate to typologize him as an amazingly resilient culture hero in his own right, especially for the more militant sections of modern Buddhist na-

tionalists today.[21] In the *Mahāvaṃsa*'s climactic account of his death, a very significant myth is related anticipating the conflation of bodhisattva and kingship ideals and specifically linking Sinhala Buddhist kingship with Bodhisattva Metteyya for the first time.

In *Mahāvaṃsa* XXXII [Geiger, 1964], entitled "Entrance into the Tusita Heaven," Duṭṭhagāmaṇī, after a long life of merit making, a career of reestablishing and consolidating Sinhala political rule and furthering the temporal-material conditions of the *sangha,* is approaching death and asking for the whereabouts of Theraputtābhaya, head *bhikkhu* of the *sangha* and his lifelong comrade-in-arms: "The great warrior, who fought victoriously through twenty-eight battles with me nor ever yielded his ground, the Theraputtābhaya comes not now to help me, now that the death struggle is begun, for he must foresee my defeat" [221]. Theraputtābhaya, who is represented in the text as possessing the ability to know the thoughts of others and to travel through the air (both indicating his possession of magical powers resulting from success in the advanced stages of meditation), flies from his mountain hermitage attended by 500 other *bhikkhu*s (again, the symbolic number representing the *sangha* constituency) who have also conquered the "passions," and presents himself before the dying king. Upon recognizing Theraputtābhaya, Duṭṭhagāmaṇī proclaims: "Formerly I fought with you and the ten great warriors at my side; now I have entered alone upon the battle with death, and the foe of death I cannot conquer" [221]. Theraputtābhaya's response is highly significant:

> O great king, fear not, ruler of men. Without conquering the foe of sin, the foe of death is unconquerable. All that has come into existence must necessarily perish also; perishable is all that exists. Mortality overcomes even the Buddhas, untouched by shame or fear; therefore think in this way: in your last mortal existence your love for the true doctrine was truly immense. Although the world of the gods was within your sight, you renounced heavenly bliss, returned to this world and did many works of merit in manifold ways. Moreover, your establishment of sole sovereignty served to bring glory to the Dhamma. Oh, how rich you are in merit! Think of all those meritorious works which you accomplished even until this present day. All will be well with you [221–22].

With this, Duṭṭhagāmaṇī implores his brother, the heir apparent, to finish the great *thūpa* (Sanskrit: *stūpa;* reliquary mound symbolic of the Buddha) at the capital in Anuradhapura. The 500 *bhikkhu*s begin to chant the *dhamma* in chorus. Duṭṭhagāmaṇī then sees, in a vision, six *deva*s coming for him in *deva* carts, entreating him to enter into the heavenly abode. He waves them away so he can continue to listen to the *bhikkhu*s chanting *dhamma.* His gesture to stop, however, is mistakenly interpreted by the *bhikkhu*s as meaning they should stop instead. Duṭṭhagāmaṇī explains that he is asking the gods to wait

for him until he has finished hearing the *dhamma,* and so all the people begin to wonder if the great king is not "wandering in his speech." Theraputtābhaya then asks the king to demonstrate to the people that the gods are indeed present. Duṭṭhagāmaṇī asks that the people throw flower garlands into the air. They obey, and the flowers garland the six *deva* carts, which now miraculously appear. Having set the peoples' minds at ease and with wonder, Duṭṭhagāmaṇī asks Theraputtābhaya which of the celestial worlds is the most beautiful. Theraputtābhaya's response: "The city of Tusita is the fairest. Awaiting the time when he shall become a Buddha, the compassionate Metteyya awaits therein" [226]. Duṭṭhagāmaṇī's image is then seen in one of the *deva* carts circumambulating the great *thūpa* three times before vanishing. His body is then cremated, and the saga of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī concludes with the following passage:

> The great king Duṭṭhagāmaṇī, who is supremely worthy of the name king, will be the first disciple of the sublime Metteyya, the king's father will be his father and the mother his mother. The younger brother Saddhatissa will be his second brother, but Sālirājakumāra, the king's son, will be the son of the sublime Metteyya [227].

In this last passage, Duṭṭhagāmaṇī's kingship is eulogized in such a fashion that the first hints of what later becomes a full-fledged association between kingship and bodhisattvahood are advanced. In describing Duṭṭhagāmaṇī, Theraputtābhaya attributes the selflessness of the bodhisattva ethos to the great king. Just as the bodhisattva delays his own entrance into *nibbāna* until he has assured the salvation of all sentient beings, so in his previous rebirth Duṭṭhagāmaṇī refused the splendors of heaven in order to perform works of merit bringing "glory to the *Dhamma.*" More pointedly, Duṭṭhagāmaṇī's future final rebirth will occur, as the result of his great merit, during the time of Metteyya, whence he will become the chief disciple of that buddha. Moreover, his own son will become the son of Metteyya. No closer association with the future buddha could possibly have been made, save the prediction that Duṭṭhagāmaṇī himself would become Metteyya.

The fusion of the two ideals of Buddhist kingship and the bodhisattva model of piety in Theravāda Buddhism was completed in later periods of Sinhala history, a development explicitly expressed by the ninth and tenth centuries, which heartily enhanced the status of the king by providing him with unquestionable legitimacy and high degrees of spiritual authority. But the short reign of Sirisanghabodhi (A.D. 251–253), according to the *Mahāvaṃsa* fifth-century account, also seems to have made a lasting impression on future generations of Sinhala kings in this regard. And it is significant that Sirisanghabodhi ascended the throne only 15 years after the reign of Vohārika

Tissa (A.D. 214–236), who, according to tradition, at first seems to have tolerated the presence of Vaitulyavādins (most likely Mahāyānists) at the Abhayagiri monastery in Anuradhapura before changing his mind, under considerable pressure from the Theravāda *bhikkhus* of the Mahāvihāra fraternity, and laying the "Mahāyāna" monks to siege. If we rely upon the *Mahāvaṃsa,* it is possible that during the period of Sirisanghabodhi's reign Mahāyāna may have first begun to exert concerted influence on the religion of the Anuradhapura capital [Paranavitana, 1928]. That influence is clearly seen in the manner in which Mahānāma, the Theravāda *bhikkhu* who was the chief editor and compiler of the *Mahāvaṃsa,* chose to extoll Sirisanghabodhi. It is well worth quoting the *Mahāvaṃsa* at length to illustrate some of the more salient bodhisattva themes connected to Sirisanghabodhi's person and brief reign.

> The king, who was known by the name Sirisaṃghabodhi, reigned two years at Anuradhapura, keeping the five precepts.
>
> In the Mahāvihāra he set up a beautiful salākā-house. When the king heard that the people of the island were come to want by reason of a drought he himself, his heart shaken with pity, lay down on the ground in the courtyard of the Great Thūpa, forming the resolve: 'Unless I be raised up by the water that the god shall rain down, I will nevermore rise up from hence, even though I die here.' As the ruler of the earth lay there thus the god poured down rain forthwith on the whole island of Lanka, reviving the wide earth. And even then he did not yet rise up because he was not swimming in the water. Then his counsellors closed up the pipes by which the water flowed away. And as he now swam in the water the pious king rose up. By his *compassion* did he in this way avert the fear of a famine in the island.
>
> At the news, 'Rebels are risen here and there,' the king had the rebels brought before him, but he released them again secretly. Then he sent for bodies of dead men, and causing terror to the people by the burning of these he did away with the fear from rebels.
>
> A yakkha known as Rattakkhi, who had come hither, made red eyes of the people here and there. If the people did but see one another and did but speak of the redness of the eyes they died forthwith, and the yakkha devoured them without fear.
>
> When the king heard of their distress he lay down with sorrowful heart alone in the chamber of fasting, keeping the eight uposatha vows, (and said): 'Till I have seen the yakkha I will not rise up.' By the (magic) power of his piety the yakkha came to him. To the king's (question): 'Who art thou?' he answered: 'It is I (the yakkha).' Why doest thou devour my subjects? Swallow them not!' 'Give up to me then only the people of one region,' said the other. And being answered: 'That is impossible,' he came gradually (demanding less and less) to one (man) only. The (king) spoke: 'No other can I give up to thee; take thou me and devour me.' With the words: 'That is impossible,' the other prayed to him

> (at last) to give him an offering in every village. 'It is well,' said the king, and over the whole island he decreed that offerings be brought to the entrance of the villages, and these he gave up to them. Thus by the great man [*mahāsatta*], *compassionate* to all beings, by the torch of the island was the fear of pestilence brought to an end.
>
> The king's treasurer, the minister Goṭhakābhaya, who had become a rebel, marched from the north against the capital. Taking his water-strainer with him the king fled alone by the south gate, since he would not bring harm to others.
>
> A man came, bearing his food in a basket, along that road, entreated the king again and again to eat of his food. When he, rich in *compassion*, had strained the water and had eaten he spoke these words: 'I am the king Saṃghabodhi; take thou my head and show it to Goṭhakābhaya, he will give thee much gold.' This he would not do, and the king to render him service gave up the ghost even as he sat. And the other took the head and showed it to Goṭhakābhaya and he, in amazement of spirit, gave him gold and carried out the funeral rites of the king with due care [261–63; parentheses Geiger's; brackets and emphases mine].

By his actions, Sirisanghabodhi very clearly cuts the figure of an earthly, royal bodhisattva, and almost a Mahāyāna bodhisattva at that. In addition to taking on vows for the welfare of his people, he is not only praised for his *karuṇā* (compassion) but is explicitly described as a *mahāsatta* (Sanskrit: *mahāsattva;* "great being"), an epithet almost exclusively reserved for Mahāyāna bodhisattvas in Buddhist Sanskrit literature, especially Avalokiteśvara (and the only time the word is used throughout the entire *Mahāvaṃsa*). So impressive was this caricature of Sirisanghabodhi's bodhisattva kingship, so emphasized was his magnanimous compassion in popular memory as well, so revered were his rainmaking powers (a power traditionally associated with relics, the *bodhi* tree, and spiritually potent kings), that every second Sinhala king from the seventh through the twelfth century included Sirisanghabodhi's name in his official title, while *every* king from the thirteenth through the sixteenth century incorporated his name formally. It is also significant that King Goṭhakābhaya, following the reign of Sirisanghabodhi, again purged the Abhayagiri fraternity in Anuradhapura of those monks sympathetic to Vaitulyavādin (Mahāyāna) teachings, perhaps following the precedent of the earlier Vohārika Tissa.

There are more suggestions from the Theravāda *Mahāvaṃsa* and the *Cūlavaṃsa* (a thirteenth-century continuation of the *Mahāvaṃsa*) indicating that kings were often regarded as bodhisattvas in the evolving Sinhala Buddhist tradition. Buddhadāsa (A.D. 340–368) is described as having "lived openly before the people the life that bodhisattvas lead" [Geiger, 1953, vol. 1: 10]. During the fifth-century reign of Dhātusena (A.D. 459–477), this king had a sculpture made of the Bodhisattva Metteyya in which the bodhisattva was fashioned in "the complete equipment of a king" [36]. In the fifth-

century *Visuddimagga,* the eminent Theravāda orthodox commentator Buddhaghosa wrote that Mahāsammata, the "great elect" and the very first Buddhist king (according to the mythic traditions of the *Dīgha Nikāya*), was himself a bodhisattva [Reynolds, 1972: 16]. The ninth-century king Sena I (A.D. 833–853) is described as "a sovereign whose aspiration was directed to the Buddha step" [143].

Various inscriptions also allude to the bodhisattva ideal in relation to concepts of Sinhala Buddhist kingship. In the tenth century, the large slab inscription attributed to Mahinda IV (A.D. 956–972) still preserved at Mihintale declares that "none but bodhisattvas would become kings of a prosperous Lanka" [*Epigrapha Zeylanica,* vol. 3: 234]. In the twelfth century, the powerful yet hardly modest Niśśanka Malla (A.D. 1187–1196) of Polonnaruva recorded the inscription that "the appearance of an impartial king should be welcomed as the appearance of a buddha" [vol. 2: 113]. In another inscription, he stated: "I will show myself in my true body which is endowed with benevolent regard for and attachment to the virtuous qualities of a bodhisattva king, who like a parent, protects the world and the religion" [175–76].

It is also worth noting that the 10 *pāramitās* (spiritual perfections) constituting the bodhisattva path also seem to have been associated with the 10 royal duties incumbent upon a king. In describing the piety of Upatissa II (A.D. 522), the *Cūlavaṃsa* [Geiger, 1953] refers to the practice of both within the same sentence, thereby fusing the ideals of kingship and bodhisattvahood: "Shunning the ten sinful actions, he practised the ten meritorious works; the King fulfilled the ten royal duties and the ten pāramitās" [vol. 1: 17].

As we shall see, bodhisattva references to Sinhala kings did not end with the political and military disestablishments of Anuradhapura and then Polonnaruva. The *Nikāya Sangrahāva* states that Vijayabāhu IV (A.D. 1270–1272) was popularly known as "Bosat Vijayabāhu" [Fernando, 1908: 24], and a fifteenth-century inscription refers to Parākramabāhu VI of Kotte (A.D. 1412–1467), whose reign we shall later discuss in depth, as "Bosat Parākramabāhu" [*Epigraphia Zeylanica,* vol. 3: 67].

In addition to these explicit links between the bodhisattva ideal and Sinhala Buddhist kingship, many kings were also responsible for the construction of magnificent bodhisattva images. Dhātusena's image of Metteyya fashioned with "the complete equipment of a king" has already been mentioned. Dappula I (A.D. 659) of Rohana (the southern bastion of Sinhala Buddhism and the province to which Anuradhapura kings periodically retreated and from which Duṭṭhagāmaṇī allegedly began his ancient epoch-making march to defeat Elāra) had a massive 15-cubit-high statue of Metteyya erected in the seventh century [Geiger, 1953, vol. 1: 95]. The *Cūlavaṃsa* further records the building of three statues of Metteyya constructed in Rohana by Parā-

kramabāhu I (A.D. 1153–1186) of Polonnaruva in the twelfth century [vol. 2: 123].

The last great king of Kandy, Kīrtti Śrī Rājasinha (1747–1781), constructed two images of Metteyya at Ridi Vihāra, about 15 miles northwest of modern Kandy. According to the *Cūlavaṃsa:*

> At the foot of the vast statue of the recumbent Buddha he had placed, one after the other, beautiful images: that of the Buddha's constant servant and protector of the true doctrine—Ānanda, that of the Bodhisattva Metteyya, that of the sublime deity (Vishṇu) and that of King Gāmaṇī [vol. 2: 294; parenthesis Geiger's].

In Sinhala Buddhist tradition, all five of these figures found at Ridi Vihāra share a common duty: to protect and propound the *dhamma* after the demise of Gotama; as Ānanda recited the *Suttapiṭaka* at the first great Buddhist council and thus formally articulated in orthodox manner the teaching of *dhamma* as it was to be canonized, as Upulvan (identified with Viṣṇu after the fourteenth century) was called upon to protect the religion of Lanka after the death of the Buddha, as Duṭṭhagāmaṇī established Sinhala religiopolitical hegemony in Lanka to preserve the *dhamma* in the future, so Metteyya himself is a symbol embodying Theravāda hopes for the *dhamma*'s future realization. The inclusion of these same figures within the cluster of sculptures at Ridi Vihāra indicates the conflation of the roles of bodhisattvas, kings, and gods vis-à-vis the *dhamma* in Theravāda tradition. That is, it is their responsibility to sustain the presence of *lōkōttara* values. And the inclusion of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī and Metteyya along with the Buddha and Ānanda no doubt stresses the future master–"beloved disciple" relationship to be attained by the former following the example of the relationship between the latter. The important point to be made here, however, is the parallel nature of duties incumbent upon these three classes of beings, the conflation of bodhisattva, king, and god.

Given this development regarding the relationship between bodhisattvas, kings, and gods, and given the limited canonical understanding of the bodhisattva role in Theravāda tradition (relegated to the previous lives of Gotama and the future appearance of Metteyya), it is reasonable to conclude that at least part of the impetus for the bodhisattva-king conception came from outside the Theravāda tradition. Or, that antecedent conceptions of bodhisattvahood and kingship made possible the enrichment of both traditions (bodhisattva and king) with the arrival of Mahāyāna ideals. When the evidence regarding the presence of Mahāyāna tradition is taken into account, it becomes even more apparent that the presence of Mahāyāna *bhikkhus* and lay followers seems to have made a considerable impact upon Sinhala concep-

tions of virtuous royalty and the ideals of the lay religious life, especially during the final centuries of Sinhala rule at Anuradhapura.

Mahāyāna Buddhism in the Anuradhapura Period

As we stated at the beginning of this chapter, Theravāda monastic chronicles claim that Buddhism first came to Sri Lanka during the reign of Devānampiya Tissa (250–210 B.C.) as a "gift" from the great Indian Buddhist emperor Aśoka, who had sent his son, Mahinda, and daughter, Sanghamitta, to establish the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunisanghas*, respectively. In emulation of Aśoka (and perhaps of Prince Vessantara), Devānampiya Tissa paradigmatically offered the wealth and services of his kingdom to the *sāsana* of the Buddha. Henceforth, defining the substance and parameters of the *sāsana,* and finding the means of supporting its various interests, became a particularly important issue for "inspired," or "divine," kingship. Sinhala rulers would see themselves as defenders of the faith, suppressors of heresies in religious matters, and the chief protectors-promoters of the *sangha.*

Given this enhanced understanding of their roles, a number of kings issued *katikāvatas* ("addenda" to the *Vinaya* code of monastic discipline; royal attempts to "purify the *sangha*" for the explicitly stated cause of furthering the *sāsana*). Issuing new sets of regulations or reenforcing the old gave kings the ability to check potential political or economic rivalry from overly enterprising monks in the *sangha.* At the same time, the well-being of the *sangha* became a chief index of a king's successful rule. Many kings were well-publicized sponsors of major building constructions for the central elite monasteries located in the capital and lavishly patronized sites of sacred import for the edification of village pilgrims or visiting officials of subordinated rank.

In the Anuradhapura period, a symbiotic relationship developed between *sangha* and state, a religiopolitical dynamic relationship later shared by Theravādins of the next millennium: the Thai, Burmese, and Cambodians.[22] In Anuradhapura, the interests of kingship and the *sangha* became thoroughly interwoven economically, socially, and therefore politically. With their shared *laukika* interests, even the geography of Anuradhapura reflected the dependency of the one upon the other: the major monasteries actually surrounded the parameters of the royal and ritual center, prompting a modern historian to comment that in Anuradhapura, not only was the king the defender of the *sangha,* but the *sangha* was as much the defender of the king![23]

Pāli *sāsana* fundamentally means "order, teaching, message" and, more specifically, "the doctrine of the Buddha" [Rhys Davids and Stede, 1921: s.v.] that is, *dhamma.* But it would seem likely that *sāsana* may have come to

mean far more than just religious doctrine to these Anuradhapura Sinhalese. It seems more likely that the term came to have a more general currency: "tradition," "legacy," "heritage," "destiny," all concepts rooted ultimately in the prophecy of the "culture hero" (the Buddha as perceived in the *Mahāvaṃsa* and *Dīpavaṃsa*) who had proclaimed on his deathbed that Lanka was to become the *Dhammadīpa* ("island of Dhamma"). To preserve in perpetuity the sacred *dhamma* of the Buddha (*lōkōttara*) became the rationale for pursuing the mutually beneficial *laukika* interests of both state and *sangha*. The *sangha*'s *laukika* interests were thus provided for by the state, and the rationale for this provision was supplied by the ultimacy of *lōkōttara* aspirations. In this way, kingship was revalorized or sacralized by its holy mission and the *sangha* was assured a privileged place in ancient Sri Lanka.

The reign of King Vaṭṭagāmaṇī (103–102 and 89–77 B.C.), however, was almost as crucial to the patterns of subsequent religiopolitical history on the island. After successfully resisting an invasion from mainland south India and commissioning a written version of canonical *Tipiṭaka* (for the first time in Buddhist history), Vaṭṭagāmaṇī constructed and gifted the Abhayagiri monastery in Anuradhapura to one Mahātissa, a loyal *bhikkhu* supporter who had played a major role in expelling south Indian invaders from Lanka. When this same monk was charged with infractions of the *Vinaya* rules by rival *bhikkhu*s of the Mahāvihāra fraternity, a number of other Mahāvihāra monks, in protest, crossed over to join Mahātissa at the Abhayagiri fraternity. Thus, what was later to become a historic rivalry between two monastic fraternities seems to have first originated over matters of interpretation with regard to monastic discipline. Then, toward the end of Vaṭṭagāmaṇī's rule, a south Indian monk named Dhammaruci arrived in Anuradhapura with a company of disciples and, finding themselves unwelcome at the Mahāvihāra fraternity because of their affiliation to the Vajjiputtaka sect, took up residence at Abhayagiri and began to propound their non-Theravādin views on *dharma*. It is difficult to determine with certainty if these were specifically early Mahāyāna perspectives on *dharma* or not, but the fact that they were considered illegitimate by the Mahāvihāra Theravādins suggests just such an implication [Paranavitana, 1928].

The two monasteries again clashed publicly during the reign of Bhātikābhaya (19 B.C.–A.D. 9). Again, the dispute was over matters of interpreting *Vinaya,* but what is perhaps more significant is that in the public debate that ensued, the Abhayagiri monks relied upon canonical texts written in Sanskrit rather than Pāli, thereby indicating another important growing distinction between the two fraternities, and one that at least circumstantially suggests a Mahāyāna presence, or the possible presence of Mahāyāna *sūtra*s.

The first fairly certain indication of Mahāyāna teachings at the Abhayagiri

monastery occurs during the reign of Vohārika Tissa (A.D. 214–236) when the king appointed his minister Kapila, according to the *Nikāya Sangrahāya* [Fernando, 1908: 12–13], to decide whether or not the Mahāvihāra's claim that Sanskrit *Vaitulyapiṭaka sūtras* being used at Abhayagiri were truly the teaching of the Buddha. Kapila found in favor of the Mahāvihāra monks, the Vaitulya *sūtra*s were burned, and the Vaitulya (meaning "dissenting") monks were disrobed and banished.

The controversy over Vetulla (Pāli for Sanskrit *Vaitulya*) teachings surfaced again, and rather dramatically, during the reign of Goṭhakābhaya, who, as we have mentioned, pillaged Abhayagiri following Sirisanghabodhi's reign and banished 60 of its monks to exile in south India. A monk-poet by the name of Sanghamitta from the famous Kāveripāṭṭaṇam monastery in what is now Tamilnadu became sympathetic to their plight, traveled from south India to Anuradhapura, gained the king's favor, and subsequently became the *rājaguru* (royal preceptor) [Ramachandran, 1954: 4]. Upon the ascension to the throne of Mahāsena (A.D. 276–303), Sanghamitta succeeded in convincing the new king that the Theravāda Mahāvihāra *bhikkhus* did not teach the true *Vinaya*. Consequently, the king issued a decree prohibiting the giving of alms to the Mahāvihāra fraternity, a decree that led to the Theravādin monastery's abandonment and temporary destruction.

The victory of the Abhayagiri over the Theravāda Mahāvihāra, however, was very short-lived, and the Mahāvihāra is again found flourishing subsequently. Yet, the character of the dispute pitting the more liberal understandings of *vinaya* and *dharma* of the Abhayagiri versus the conservative traditions of the Theravāda Mahāvihāra was indicative of intra-*sangha* disputes from the third century A.D. until the unification of the *sangha* under Parākramabāhu I of Polonnaruva in the twelfth century.

It is interesting to note that the fifth-century Chinese pilgrim Fa Hien found no doctrinal distinctions between the two Anuradhapura fraternities [Beal, 1884, vol. 1: 46–51]. Thus, the Abhayagiri monastery was probably not a haven for Mahāyāna doctrinal purity, nor a bastion of anti-Theravāda sentiment, but rather more progressive or tolerant in its administration while seeking frequent contacts with monks from other parts of the Buddhist world. (The Abhayagiri's inclusive conception of the *sangha* will be indicated more specifically shortly within the context of discussions centering upon inscriptions.) On the other hand, the conservatism of the Mahāvihāra probably owed not so much from concerns over purity of doctrine (*sāsana*, strictly speaking) but rather with the issue of how to best preserve its Theravāda legacy through strict adherence to monastic disciplinary prescriptions. This was more a matter of *vinaya* than *dhamma*. Strictly adhering to rules of ordination and pro-

tecting *sangha* monastery boundaries (*sīma*) seems to have preoccupied much of Theravāda ecclesiology ever since.

Nonetheless, the eminent fifth-century Theravāda commentator of the Mahāvihāra, Buddhaghosa, characterized the teachings of the Vetullaka (Vaitulya) sect as *mahāsūnyavāda* ("the path of great emptiness"). Elaborating upon their teachings in his commentary on the *Kathāvatthu* (a text recounting how during the time of Aśoka the Theravādins refuted heretical views regarding the nature of the self and the Buddha), Buddhaghosa explains that the Vetullakas held a docetic view of the Buddha; that is, they believed that the Buddha is utterly transcendent and appeared in human form as Siddhattha Gotama only to make known the truth of *dhamma*. This "buddhology," of course, is similar to, if not identical with, the views advanced by the earlier Lokottara Mahāsaṃghikas who originally propounded the view that there were two natures of the Buddha: one eternal and transcendent (hence they were also known as *lokottaravādin*s) and the other temporal and phenomenal (corresponding to what the Sinhalese mean by *laukika*). We have noted here how this was subsequently amended to incorporate the third "body" of the Buddha, the *Sambhogakāya*, which in time became identified with Avalokiteśvara.

The fact that Mahāyāna "buddhology" was incorporated into the religious culture of Sri Lanka in general, and even into the Theravāda tradition itself, is evident in a number of ways. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-tsang described the Sinhalese monks he met at Buddha Gaya in India as following "the teaching of the Buddha, according to the dharma of the Sthavira school of the Mahāyāna sect" [Beal, vol. 2: 133 and 247]. What is so intriguing about this reference is the fact that Hiuen-tsang subsumed the Theravāda school (Sthavira) within the context of Mahāyāna rather than within Hīnayāna traditions. What Hiuen-tsang's statement probably reflects is that he had encountered Theravāda *bhikkhu*s from the Anuradhapura Abhayagiri fraternity who were sympathetic to Mahāyāna perspectives well known and discussed at the Anuradhapura monastery.

The degree to which Mahāyāna and *tantra* were present in the religion of Sinhala Anuradhapura culture is further substantiated by Gunawardana's studies. Noting the fourteenth-century *Nikāya Sangrahāya*'s condemnation of Sena I (A.D. 833–856), which mentions the "foolish" king's acceptance of the Vajraparvata *nikāya*, he points out that a Sanskrit inscription found within the Abhayagiri monastery dating to the early ninth century (Sena's reign) refers to the building of a new hermitage for the study of *śāstra*s from the four *nikāya*s [Gunawardana, 1966: 57–63]. Arguing that the script of this inscription resembles others found in the Bihar/Bengal regions of India at the same time,

Gunawardana points out that the Chinese pilgrim itinerant I Tsing reported that the phrase "four *nikāyas*" in Magadha referred to the Sarvāstivādins, Mahāsaṃghikas, Sthaviravādins, and Sammitīyas. Gunawardana points out further that this is how the fourteenth-century Tibetan historian Bu-ston also used the phrase. The implication, then, is that this broad inclusive conception of the *sangha* as being constituted by a number of schools was current at the Abhayagiri monastery in the early ninth century.

On the basis of inscribed *dhāraṇīs* found on stone slabs within the monastery dating to the same time, Gunawardana [1966: 65] goes on to note that *tantr*ic teachings were also known at ninth-century A.D. Abhayagiri. Citing other evidence from Bu-ston that Sinhalese monks interacted with *tantr*ic monks at Buddha Gaya, Gunawardana concludes that the building of a hermitage for the "four *nikāyas*" was probably "the first attempt made with royal patronage to absorb those elements into local Buddhist tradition" [66].

Gunawardana is careful, however, to point out that such developments did not lead to a wholesale incorporation of Mahāyāna bodhisattvas into Theravāda tradition. While it is clear that the cult of Mahāyāna bodhisattvas thrived from the seventh through the tenth centuries, it by no means follows that the Mahāvihāra monastery was very sympathetic [Gunawardana, 1979: 224]. On the other hand, the widespread veneration of Mahāyāna bodhisattvas during this time seems to have had a rather indirect impact on the Mahāvihāra. On the basis of many records recovered from this period carrying a warning that those who violate certain regulations will not be able to see the future Bodhisattva Metteyya, Gunawardana [1966] notes the increasing popularity of Metteyya also emerging at this time. This, he argues, signals the rejuvenation of the Theravāda cult of Bodhisattva Metteyya in rivalry with the Mahāyāna bodhisattva cults. If, indeed, the Mahāyāna bodhisattvas were venerated at all within the Theravāda orientation, Gunawardana [1966] asserts that this was a phenomenon more akin to the worshipping of "Buddhist gods" rather than a Mahāyāna practice per se. He contends that "the parallel trends of 'borrowing' gods from the Mahāyāna and of 'converting' *brahman*ic deities to Buddhism seems to have led to the formation of the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon" [224]. Worshiped as "Buddhist gods," Mahāyāna bodhisattvas were thus shorn of their *lōkōttara* ultimacy and accommodated for their *laukika* efficacy.

Gunawardana is undoubtedly right about this process of Theravāda incorporation and formulation. But such an incorporation seems to have begun only after Mahāyāna cultic centers had been established for some time in Anuradhapura/Mihintale and other regions of the island. While it seems that the fortunes of Mahāyāna began to wane with the destruction of Anuradhapura (and hence Abhayagiri) by the south Indian Pāṇḍyans and the Cholas in the

tenth and eleventh centuries, and never really recovered, the vitality of Mahāyāna in politically peripheral regions of the island is testified to by the many inscriptional and sculptural remains discovered recently in those parts.

The most spectacular recent discovery of evidence pertaining to the presence of Mahāyāna tradition in Sri Lanka during the early medieval period occurred in 1982 when two archaeological laborers unearthed seven gold plates in the southwest quadrant of the Jetavanārāma *Dāgäba* (*stūpa*) in Anuradhapura containing portions of a *prajñāpāramitā* ("perfection of wisdom") *sūtra* [Ratnayaka et al., 1983]. The script written on the gold plates is Sinhala, but the language in which it was written is Sanskrit, a finding that may suggest the Mahāyāna was indigenously cultivated among Sinhalese *bhikkhu*s and not just the result of "foreign" monks in residence at Abhayagiri.

The enshrinement of the gold plates within the *stūpa* is highly symbolic of the Mahāyāna cosmology and "buddhology" expressed through the doctrine of the "three bodies of the Buddha." In this case, the enshrined *prajñāpāramitā* text is taken to be the *dhātu* or essence/emptiness (*śūnya*) of the Buddha's presence that in reality permeates all of existence (which, in turn, is symbolized by the surrounding *stūpa*). At once, the enshrined text within the *stūpa* symbolizes the quintessentially unqualified *Dharmakāya* transcendentally present (*Sambhogakāya*) within finite form (*Rūpakāya* or *Nirmāṇakāya*). That the enshrined *dhātu* is a *dharma sūtra* rather than an alleged physical remain of the historical Gotama's body indicates further the Mahāyāna rather than the Theravāda orientation of the reliquary in question.

The proliferation of the *trikāya* "buddhology" throughout early medieval Sri Lanka is also evident in a number of other archaeological finds. Ninety-one inscribed copper plates in Sinhala and Sanskrit have been found at the Indikaṭusāya *Dāgäba* at nearby Mihintale, containing portions of *prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s that date to the ninth century [*Epigraphia Zeylanica*, vol. 3: 199–212; vol. 4: 238–42].

The notion of the *dhātu* as the essential "empty presence" of the Buddha pervading all of existence is also found expressed in a large *maṇḍala* carved into a boulder near Tiriyaya on the northeast coast at Kuccaveli. In describing this find, Dohanian [1977] states:

> The maṇḍala is comprised of sixteen squares within each of which a stūpa is carved in low relief. The stūpa is a sign of the Buddha-Dharma, that is—the Buddha in Nirvana. Multiplied sixteen times, it involves itself in all space, projecting its power and meaning to the four directions four times over. The field of its manifestations is thereby determined as All-Space, that is—the Cosmos comprehended by the total of its multiple divisions.
>
> To the side of the maṇḍala, is a Sanskrit inscription, cut in the Pallava-grantha

> characters of seventh century date. It is comprised of two laudatory verses and closes with the prayer of the donor that he may attain Buddhahood and thereby redeem mankind [24].

Mudiyanse [1967] notes that the Sanskrit Trikāyastava inscription found at Mihintale extolling the virtues of the bodhisattva ideal refers to a vow to save all sentient beings from the ocean of *saṃsāra.* Within the text of the inscription is found the word *karuṇākareṇa,* "which may be translated as 'hand of compassion' [and] is evocative of Avalokiteśvara" [86; brackets mine].

In addition to *maṇḍala*s, a number of inscribed *mantra*s dating to the ninth and tenth centuries have been discovered at Abhayagiri and Vijayārāma in Anuradhapura and at Nalanda Gedige (halfway between Anuradhapura and Kandy) [Mudiyanse, 1967: 26–27]. The findings at Vijayārāma are particularly significant, for the ninth-century *mantra*s discovered at this site contain invocations specifically to the bodhisattvas Tārā and Avalokiteśvara, as well as to the buddhas Śikhin and Amoghasiddha. Other obvious *tantr*ic *mantra* inscriptions dating to roughly the same time period have been found at Mihintale, Polonnaruva, and in other archaeological digs in Anuradhapura.

However, the most important inscriptional find for determining the historical presence of Avalokiteśvara at an early period in Sri Lankan history is the Tiriyaya inscription that, along with several bronze images of Avalokiteśvara and Tārā found there in 1983, dates to the seventh or eighth century.

Mudiyanse [1967: 8, 86], following Paranavitana, has asserted that the Tiriyaya inscriptions, in Pallava-Grantha scripts, were probably written due to the growing influential presence of Mahāyāna doctrines taught by the great *tantr*ic teachers Guṇavarman, Vajrabodhi, and Amoghavajra, who are known to have enjoyed great accommodations with Sinhala kings during the eight century. All three *tantr*ic teachers were itinerants. Guṇavarman reportedly continued his travels, which originated in Kashmir, to Java, where he successfully converted an important king. A branch of the Abhayagiri *nikāya* is also known to have been founded in Java at about this very same time. Vajrabodhi enjoyed a long residence at the Pallava court of Narasiṃhavarman II in south India before his arrival on the island and subsequent departure for China. His prize pupil, Amoghavajra, was a native Sinhalese. All three resided at Abhayagiri in Anuradhapura during their extended residencies in Sri Lanka. Vajrabodhi's career is particularly important to us. He is generally credited with having introduced *tantr*ism to China after having traveled there through Sri Lanka and Sri Vijaya (modern Malaysia). Ramachandran reports that Vajrabodhi gained his initial fame as a celebrated teacher at Malayanadu (in south India) in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. He notes that Malayanadu adjoins "*Podigai* in Tirunelveli district . . . a hill sacred to the

Buddhists, where it is said that Agastya, the father of Tamil, repaired and learnt Tamil from the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, the presiding god of the hill" [12]. This Tamil tradition cited by Ramachandran lends circumstantial support to the speculation that the cult of Avalokiteśvara began in the south of India in conjunction with the popular hill-god cults of the region, especially that of Aiyaṉār.

While it cannot be directly established that these great *tantr*ics were responsible for the Tiriyaya inscriptions, Mudiyanse is right in citing the fact that the court of Pallava was sympathetic to *tantr*ic Buddhism and became a conduit for a new cultural influence headed for Sri Lanka. In fact, the style of most of the early medieval Avalokiteśvara sculptures about to be considered, in the opinion of Dohanian, derived precisely from Pallava sources of influence, which, in turn, can be seen as linked stylistically to Javanese examples of Buddhist iconography as well. The political history of Sri Lanka and south India at this time also warrants the conclusion that centers of Pallava high culture in south India made a dramatic contribution to the emergence of *tantr*ic Buddhism in Sinhala culture.

The inscriptions found at Tiriyaya are the earliest evidence in writing regarding the presence of the cult of Avalokiteśvara in Sri Lanka. Altogether, seven inscriptions have been discovered at Tiriyaya, the earliest of which are in Brahmī (indicating that nearby caves have been used by Buddhist *bhikkhu*s since pre-Christian times). But the most interesting inscription, located about 200 feet south of the *vaṭadāgē* ruins (which command a spectacular view of the Indian Ocean to the east), dates to the eighth century and records the foundation of the *Girikaṇḍicaitya,* a small *stūpa* inside the *vaṭadāgē,* by two merchants named Thapussaka and Vallika. These are the same names for the two merchants mentioned in the Pāli canonical *Vinaya Mahāvagga* who purportedly were the first to encounter Gotama the Buddha after his enlightenment experience. According to that account, they became the first lay disciples of the Buddhist tradition by taking refuge in the Buddha and the *Dhamma* (the *Sangha* had yet to be formed). Legend has it that they were given a hair relic by the Buddha as a memorial to their convesion. Burmese Theravādins claim that the two merchants made their way to what is now Rangoon and that the hair relic in their possession was installed within the famous Shwedagon Pagoda. There is also a tradition in Afghanistan to the same effect. But what is interesting about the Sinhalese version is that this seventh or eighth-century inscription purporting to report this famous ancient episode is corroborated by the *Pūjāvaliya,* a thirteenth-century Sinhala text, thus indicating a long-standing currency of the myth in Sinhala Buddhist circles [Sirisoma, 1983: 5]. There are also two other sites in Sri Lanka, one near Kurunegala and the other at Ambalantota on the southern coast, that make the same claim as Tiriyaya.

The name Girikaṇḍa appears in the fifth-century *Mahāvaṃsa* [70], where it is used as a name for a mountain and district as part of the legend of Paṇḍukābhaya. Girikaṇḍa Vihāra is also mentioned by Buddhaghosa in his *Visuddhimagga*. The legend of the two merchants coming to Sri Lanka after their conversion by the Buddha, referred to in the Tiriyaya inscription, is recounted fully in the *Pūjāvaliya* and here translated conveniently by Sirisoma:

> They received those hair-relics in a jewelled casket and took them to their own town where they worshipped them. In the course of time they went on a sea-voyage and to the island of Sri Lanka; and going in search of firewood and water, they came to the place called Girihandu. They placed the casket of relics on the summit of the rock; and when they returned after having cooked and eaten their meals they were unable to move the relic-casket from the place where it was. They then knew that this was a holy place and, having honoured it, covered (the casket) with a heap of stones, offered flowers and went their way. In later times, there was a vihāra named Girihandu at that place [5; parenthesis Sirisoma's].

As described in the *Epigraphia Zeylanica* [1904–], the shrine into which this casket was placed is referred to within the Tiriyaya inscription as the place

> where dwells always the B[uddhāṃkuru—a Buddha in embryo], the teacher, known as Avalokiteśvara, who is worthy to be honoured by the gods and kinnaras, . . . whatever has been caused, by that let the misery (dukkha) of the world be reduced . . . all phenomena are transitory [*Epigraphia Zeylanica* 4: 160; brackets Paranavitana's (from footnote); parenthesis mine].

Sirisoma, Mudiyanse, and Paranavitana all point to the general symbolic significance of the *vaṭadāgē*'s location. Because it commands a spectacular view of the sea, it is perfectly located for an Avalokiteśvara shrine, given the fact that the bodhisattva was particularly venerated among seagoing merchants and travelers. The myth of the two famous merchants and their connection to the Tiriyaya Avalokiteśvara shrine is also commensurate, they say, given the fact that the cult of Avalokiteśvara was, by this time and at this place, primarily popular with laity. But perhaps of greater interest is the fact that the story is about the establishment of the Buddha's "presence" on the island. That a shrine for the veneration of Avalokiteśvara became the cultic center of this site indicates the bodhisattva's perceived relationship to the coming of Buddhism to Sri Lanka. Indeed, he is the protector of that "presence," a symbol of its "multitudinous" realization (*sangha*).

The bronze images found at Tiriyaya, with the possible exception of the Situlpahuva Avalokiteśvara, may well be the earliest Avalokiteśvara icons found in Sri Lanka. As such, they constitute a natural point of initial consid-

eration for our discussion in Chapter 3 of the symbolism of the early Avalokiteśvara and later Nātha images found on the island.

In summary, it appears that by the fifth century A.D., the monastic traditions of Anuradhapura responsible for the writing of the *Mahāvaṃsa* and *Dīpavaṃsa* characterized the concerns of kingship and bodhisattvahood as overlapping: both were essentially concerned with perpetuating the *dhamma* of the Buddha. Indeed, the bodhisattva seems to have served eventually as an inspirational model for kingship, a development that significantly enhanced the status of the king. Given epigraphic evidence and inferences drawn from the monastic chronicles, Mahāyāna teachings and practices were cultivated within the Abhayagiri monastic fraternity in Anuradhapura, leading to disputes with the rival Mahāvihāra Theravāda, disputes that had to be adjudicated by kings exercising their duty to protect and to purify the *sāsana*. By the eighth and ninth centuries, *tantra* had also been accommodated at Abhayagiri and other more peripheral hermitages such as Tiriyaya wherein the cult of Avalokiteśvara was introduced.

In short, the religous culture of ancient and early medieval Sri Lanka was not a static given. Mahāyāna traditions were brought to the island for centuries by itinerant monks from India or by returning Sinhalese. While the remains of a Mahāyāna and Tantric presence in eighth- and ninth-century Anuradhapura and Mihintale monastic contexts are substantial, the archaeological finds at the Tiriyaya complex on the northeast coast also indicate the presence of an active Avalokiteśvara cult celebrated, perhaps, within the religiocultural milieu of a nominally seafaring community.

3

Ascetic and King: The Iconography of Avalokiteśvara and Nātha

The iconographic traditions of Avalokiteśvara and Nātha from the early medieval through the modern periods of Sri Lankan cultural history form a critical segment of this study. Sculptural images of the bodhisattva and the god provide a trail of anthropomorphic symbolism from the time of Avalokiteśvara's Mahāyāna cultic acceptance into the religious culture of the island in about the seventh or eighth century A.D. to Nātha's identification with the future Buddha Maitreya within the folds of Sinhala Buddhism in the contemporary modern era.

In this chapter, our discussion will focus upon the symbolism of Avalokiteśvara images within the framework of Sri Lankan religious culture and the Sinhala *laukika* and *lōkōttara* categories we have discussed as categorically significant in Chapter 1. In so doing, we shall illustrate visually how the iconographic symbolism of Avalokiteśvara in Sri Lanka expressed the specifically Buddhist religious motifs of ascetic determination, royal power, and bodhisattva altruistic compassion.

In our background discussions regarding the cult of the bodhisattva and the presence of Mahāyāna and *tantr*ic traditions in Buddhist Sri Lanka, it became clear that devotion to Avalokiteśvara was an emerging religious fact of early medieval Sinhala culture. In some measure, this development was only possible because of the inclusive concept of *sangha* increasingly evident within the Abhayagiri fraternity at Anuradhapura during the eighth and ninth centuries and the apparent simultaneous decline in influence on the royal court exercised by their orthodox Theravāda Mahāvihāra rivals. At the same time,

one of the most salient traits of the cult of Avalokiteśvara and Nātha in Sri Lanka is that it has been consistently more popularly or lay oriented in nature than monastic. Therefore, the emergence of a popular Avalokiteśvara cult in Sri Lanka must have been associated with an even broader conception of religious community, one that included among its ranks many lay devotees as well as monks of a more liberal perspective. Indeed, the bodhisattva vow, as articulated in Mahāyāna Buddhist Sanskrit literature, is aimed at the salvation of all sentient beings. All sentient beings constitute the "total field" or comprehensive objective of the bodhisattva's soteriological aim. From this widest perspective, then, all beings ultimately constitute the *sangha*. This Mahāyāna conception may have had a compelling inspirational impact upon the laity in early medieval Sri Lanka. If this was so, then the emergence of the cult of Avalokiteśvara indicated a presence of popular conceptions of buddhahood and religious community wherein access to sacral power and spiritual transformation was considerably widened.

In the Theravāda tradition of Sri Lanka, the normative conception of religious community was articulated in a much more limited way, yet it remained expansive by most standards. What I am referring to here is the notion of Lanka as a religious community, a nation guided by a concept of destiny: that within its coastal boundaries and among its devoted people, the *dhamma* of the Buddha would flourish in purity and perpetuity. This, of course, is the ancient self-image of religious community first projected in the traditional chronicles, the *Mahāvaṃsa* and the *Dīpavaṃsa*. Here, all devout Buddhists of Lanka form an extended *sangha*, or Lanka itself *is* the *sangha*. Later, this belief in Lanka's collective spiritual destiny legitimated the incorporation of non-Theravāda deities into the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon as guardians of the nation, as powers that could be appealed to in order to assist in the preservation of Buddhist Lanka's special spiritual mission. Bardwell Smith [1979], in reflecting upon the principles of religious assimilation in early medieval Sri Lanka, has put the matter this way:

> Basically, religious assimilation is the process of incorporating, subordinating and transforming new or different elements into an on-going tradition of belief and practice. . . . It is thus dynamic, dialectical and reciprocal. . . . One sees, therefore, in the very basic process of assimilation an attempt to establish and maintain a viable balance of centripetal and centrifugal forces, or between so-called orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The crux of the dilemma, from the standpoint of the dominant tradition, is how to be enriched by exposure and assimilation without losing a sense of one's self-identity [349].

In fact, this process was precisely the communal fate of Avalokiteśvara as it was articulated by the fourteenth century. And, following his incorporation into the Buddhist pantheon after the disappearance of Mahāyāna on the island,

images of Avalokiteśvara as Nātha Dēviyō began to appear within the same halls of worship as those of the Buddha and other guardian deities. The Sinhalese ultimately assimilated the bodhisattva as a protective deity, conceiving of him as aspiring to become a buddha in his own right, thereby preserving at once the *lōkōttara* and *laukika* orientations of his cult but clearly emphasizing the latter.

Yet, before this assimilation and transformation, it is clear that Avalokiteśvara was accepted into the cultic life of a wider pluralistic Buddhist religious community (which included Mahāyāna aspirants) not solely on the basis of the popularity and impact of a new doctrine (specifically, the *trikāya* concept of the three bodies of the Buddha), nor yet on the basis of his powers to act as a national guardian, but also because his powerful figure represented accessible supernatural compassion that could alleviate the troublesome conditions of *saṃsāra* unconditionally for individual devotees. Or, to put the matter in another way, Avalokiteśvara was perceived to act powerfully *because* of his great compassion—in a manner characteristic of great kings on the one hand and supernatural, cosmic bodhisattvas on the other. While his introduction to island culture was no doubt the result of the fact that his popularity had earlier arisen in Pallava south India and had come to Sri Lanka during a time of great Pallava cultural influence, his introduction also signaled genuinely new conceptions of divine power expressed within the imagery of Sinhala Buddhist symbolism.

Indeed, the matrix of symbolism expressed in Avalokiteśvara's traditional Sinhala Buddhist iconography is rooted in combined conceptions of royal power, ascetic prowess, and bodhisattva-like altruistic compassion. The combination of these symbolisms was eventually articulated in such a way as to be commensurate with his later role as a guardian deity of Sri Lanka's Theravāda destiny. Specifically, the ascetic motifs that were so dominant early in the history of his cult were increasingly subordinated to the royal, thereby reflecting a shift from more *lōkōttara*-oriented soteriological concerns to the more *laukika* concerns associated with his eventual role as a guardian deity of the nation. In turn, later beliefs in his identity as Maitrī reflect a shift back in the direction of *lōkōttara*, an issue to be examined in the conclusion.

The early popular Mahāyāna cult of Avalokiteśvara and his visual representation in sculpture must have influenced the philosophical and cosmological perspective of many Theravāda Buddhist monks and laity on the island. In commenting upon this influence, Frank Reynolds [1974] has stated:

> Though it is impossible on the basis of the sources which we possess to differentiate the positions of the various groups which were competing with the Mahāvihāra on matters of detail, they certainly emphasized and developed the mythic and symbolic elements in the Buddhology of the early community and

> moved in the direction of a "docetic" conception of the Buddha-nature. The Buddha became, particularly for the . . . later Mahāyāna groups, a divine-like being whose true existence was located on a trans-historical, trans-human plane. From the soteriological point of view, these groups focused on the Bodhisatta ideal as the most appropriate and meaningful model for the Buddhist seeker [72].

While Reynolds goes on to note how this buddhology was incorporated (with restraint) by the Theravādins through various popular practices including the chanting of *paritta* and the veneration of relics, in modern Sri Lanka it is a religious fact that many laity and a lesser number of monks regard the Buddha as an active force in the world, in juxtaposition to formal Theravāda doctrine, which regards him as a *Tathāgata* ("thus-gone-one") who, through his exemplary spiritual life, showed his followers how to tread the path to *nibbāna* beyond this conditioned world (*saṃsāra*). Gombrich explored this issue thoroughly in his *Precept and Practice* [1971]. What I am suggesting is that the popular cult of the bodhisattva may have been ultimately responsible for altering buddhological conceptions among segments of popularly oriented Buddhists, that following the demise of Mahāyāna and the incorporation of the bodhisattva into the Sinhala pantheon as a deity, the figure of the Buddha assumed a much more active or *laukika* profile. This impact upon conceptions of the Buddha may be one of the unrecognized legacies of Mahāyāna in modern traditional Buddhist Sri Lanka, but there were other forces at work that helped to exaggerate this impact as well.

Mudiyanse has asserted that the doctrinal influence of great *tantr*ic teachers set forth in the finery of sophisticated eighth-century religious discourse is articulated through subsequent artistic expression, specifically at the Mahāyāna cultic complex at Tiriyaya. For Mudiyanse, religious thought is rather straightforwardly reflected in religious art. What I am suggesting, on the other hand, is that when Avalokiteśvara and other Mahāyāna bodhisattvas such as Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra became popular objects of religious devotion in early medieval Sinhala culture, their images, reflecting alternative buddhological formulations, made an impact upon popular Theravāda conceptions of buddhahood. In discussing the general relationships between art, religious thought and symbols, and society, Kenneth Clark [1981] has put the matter abstractly in this way:

> In the relationship of art and society the importance of an accepted iconography cannot be overly stated. Without it, the network of beliefs and customs which hold a society together may never take shape as art. If an iconography contains a number of sufficiently powerful symbols, it can positively alter a philosophical system. The points of dogma for which no satisfactory image can be created tend to be dropped and popular religious expression and episodes which have

> scarcely occupied the attention of theologians tend to grow in importance if they produce a compelling image [68].

The early iconography of Avalokiteśvara seems to have created just such a compelling image within the context of accepted buddhology. It was not so much the sophisticated *trikāya* cosmology among monastic adherents that eventually became so popular and widespread, but rather the more generally attributed miraculous power of the bodhisattva (as symbolized through his iconographic representation) to rescue suffering, sentient beings from life-threatening existential conditions and from continued rebirth in *saṃsāra*. Specifically, this power to save was eventually abstracted from its Mahāyāna cultic base and later put to use within the context of a new role for Avalokiteśvara as a protector/guardian of Sinhala polity and religion. That is, Avalokiteśvara's saving power was redirected from its balanced *lōkōttara* and *laukika* orientations to the more *laukika* end of the spectrum.

The Iconography of Avalokiteśvara in Early Medieval Sri Lanka

In the earliest Sri Lankan images of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, Avalokiteśvara was represented as far more than a guardian god; he represented power wherein asceticism and compassion had been combined in one figure. These two motifs remain constantly present in varying degrees throughout the history of his iconographic representation, and their relative degrees of articulation allow us to positively identify the bodhisattva long after his original identity as Avalokiteśvara had been forgotten in Sri Lanka. The relative shifts in the use of motifs associated with asceticism on the one hand and royal power on the other further reflect the transformation of Avalokiteśvara from a Mahāyāna bodhisattva to a Sinhala national guardian deity.

Altogether, six small bronze images from Tiriyaya now in the possession of the Department of Archaeology in Colombo have been positively identified as Avalokiteśvara icons by the Government of Sri Lanka Department of Archaeology (see Plates 1–6). They bear an unmistakable attribute of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara as he was consistently portrayed in Sri Lanka: the image of a meditating *dhyāni* buddha embedded within a *jaṭāmakuṭa* (stylized piled hair of an ascetic usually supported by a royal coronet). The meditating buddha, of course, is none other than Amitābha (the "cosmic Buddha" of our era according to the developed Mahāyāna cosmology presented in Chapter 2). This attribute has been peculiar only to Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī, and to a lesser extent Hayagrīva, throughout the history of Buddhist iconography until it began to be readily exploited by the Sinhalese in late medieval times as a

more general symbol to express the belief that their guardian deities would eventually become buddhas.[1] A seventh image (see Plate 7) bearing five *dhyāni* buddhas in the *jaṭāmakuṭa*, similar to the *jaṭāmakuṭa* of the famous colossal rock-cut image known as Kuṣṭharājagala (see Plate 8) at Valigama on the southwest coast, is of questionable identity but probably that of Mañjuśrī or Samantabhadra in the *dhyāni* bodhisattva manifestation of his *sambhogakāya* aspect.[2] Two images of Avalokiteśvara's *śakti*, Tārā, have also been discovered at Tiriyaya (see Plates 9 and 10). The Tiriyaya images, obviously, are of uneven quality and condition, the most refined and best preserved being the lotus-positioned Mañjuśrī bodhisattva image in Plate 7 and the standing Avalokiteśvara bronzes in Plates 5 and 6.

Plates 1–4 show a bare-chested Avalokiteśvara in variant positions of the fluid *rājalīlāsana* ("the posture of royal ease") with facial expressions reflecting relative degrees of composure or equanimity. In these images, Avalokiteśvara is portrayed as a source of great worldly potency yet has remained serenely detached from the surrounding conditioning process of *saṃsāra*. In Plate 11 (perhaps the earliest Avalokiteśvara found at Anuradhapura and therefore roughly contemporaneous with the Tiriyaya bronzes) and in Plate 1, the *yajñopavīta* (sacred thread of *brahman*ical priests and ascetics; suggesting Hindu iconographic influence) found in the images of Plates 2–4 is missing. Instead, surrounding the neck and draping the left side of the torso in Plate 1 is a rosary symbolizing the bodhisattva's manifold capacity to respond compassionately to petitions of the faithful. His right hand is in the *varada mudrā*, beckoning the devotee to seek his help, rather than in the *kaṭaka* ("lotus-wielding") *mudrā* characteristic of the images in Plates 2 and 3. The *kaṭaka mudrā* is predominantly associated with his iconography subsequently. The image in Plate 1 is bedecked with princely arm bands and belt while being seated on a *padmāsana* ("lotus seat") with a lotus pendant attached to his left shoulder. The bronze icon in Plate 1, as well as in the Mañjuśrī icon of Plate 7 with the five *dhyāni* buddhas in the *jaṭāmakuṭa*, masterfully combine the symbols attributed to bodhisattvas and kings, thereby conveying a powerful this-worldly (*laukika*) prowess.

Plate 11, however, represents the *lōkōttara* spiritual end to be realized by the bodhisattva. In this figure, the bodhisattva is represented in full *samādhi* (deep meditation). There is no telling royal arm band, no *yajñopavīta*, no lotus-wielding *mudrā*, no rosary, no *rājalīlāsana*, and the coronet is greatly understated, if not altogether absent. There is absolutely no hint of royalty in this image. Rather, Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is here represented fully in the *lōkōttara* orientation, completely composed and concentrated in deep, detached meditation. Only the *jaṭāmakuṭa* with the embedded Amitābha separates the icon from being identified as a Buddha image per se. Thus, Plates 11

and 1 (dating to the eighth century A.D. from Anuradhapura and Tiriyaya, respectively) clearly reflect the complementary orientations of *lōkōttara* and *laukika*.

Plates 2, 3, and 4 understate the royal motifs, yet the coronets remain quite visible in Plates 2 and 4 in a fashion similar to the famous Avalokiteśvara image dated by Coomaraswamy [1956] to the eighth century and now preserved in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (see Plate 12). Further, the *yajñopavītas* in Plates 2, 3, and 4 remain quite distinct. Although Plates 2 and 3 indicate icons that are much cruder in execution, all three of these images successfully combine both orientations: royal power on the one hand and the renunciatory qualities of the ascetic on the other.

The two standing bronzes in Plates 5 and 6 comparatively reveal the same ascetic and royal motifs, although not to the same extreme degree as expressed in the comparison between Plates 11 and 1. The standing Avalokiteśvara bronze in Plate 5 represents the most visible expression of the ascetic profile. Unlike the standing image in Plate 6, this icon is entirely nude from the waist up with no *yajñopavīta,* the face has decidedly less expression, and his waistband is very simply designed. There is little to suggest royalty in the profile of this icon, and, as such, it shares almost completely in the pure ascetic orientation of the massive gneiss-carved freestanding standing eighth-century Avalokiteśvara statue discovered at Situlpahuva in the early twentieth century within the jungles of Yala National Park (Plates 13 and 14).

The image in Plate 6 is exquisitely executed and perhaps the best preserved of all the Tiriyaya bronzes. Here the bodhisattva seems poised, ready to act in comforting fashion and yet completely at ease. There remains a supple and fluid ambience to the image despite the rigidity usually characteristic of standing bodhisattva images. In contrast to the more ascetically oriented icon in Plate 5, the facial expression here is obviously more relaxed and assuring, almost comforting.

In all, the bronzes of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara found at Tiriyaya reveal the fact that the bodhisattva was not represented in one absolutely uniform iconographic fashion from the time of his earliest introduction to cultic life in Sri Lankan religious culture. This is hardly surprising, given the fact that in the early medieval Indian Mahāyāna *Sādhanamālā* no less than 108 iconographic forms of Avalokiteśvara are described (along with the manner in which a devotee is advised to approach the specific icons in question) [Bhattacaryya, 1924: *passim*]. But one particularly important Indian iconographic form of Avalokiteśvara described in the *Sādhanamālā,* that of Siṃhanāda Lokeśvara, seems to have been specifically very influential in Sri Lanka. Moreover, there is a tenth-century Nepalese miniature painting, now preserved at Cambridge, depicting Siṃhanāda Lokeśvara and containing an

etched caption reading: "Siṃhaladvīpa Arogyācala Lokeśvara" ("Lokeśvara of the hospital on the island of Siṃhala"). Mudiyanse [1967] notes that this is evidence of the international fame that the icons and cult of Avalokiteśvara in medieval Sri Lanka could claim at that time. But more central to the discussion at hand, the Tiriyaya bronzes in Plates 1–4, Coomaraswamy's miniature Avalokiteśvara now in the Boston museum (Plate 12), the now-famous Veheragala Avalokiteśvara (Plate 15), and the crucially important Kandy Nātha Dēvālaya image (Plate 16) all bear very strong resemblances to Siṃhanāda Lokeśvara: the ascetic profile, the *rājalīlāsana,* the *jaṭāmakuṭa* set upon notable coronets, and a lack of royal motifs. Of the iconographic forms described in the *Sādhanamālā,* Siṃhanāda Lokeśvara is easily one of the least complicated and, more importantly, the most ascetically oriented.

Siṃhanāda Lokeśvara, however, within the context of Sri Lankan iconographic traditions (which had been so wedded to the practice of sculpting *samādhi* [meditating] buddhas on the one hand and royal princes on the other) represents a moderate compromise between the two local extremes. However, within the total context of all early medieval South Asian Buddhist iconography, Sri Lankan bodhisattva images (here, those pertaining especially to the cult of Avalokiteśvara) tend to be much more ascetically oriented and understated when compared with those sculpted in India, especially in the north.

This generalization becomes radically apparent in Plates 11 (especially) and 5, which freely express the *lōkōttara* dimension while almost totally eclipsing the *laukika* motifs that are vividly articulated in Plates 1 and 7. In Plates 1 and 7, the motifs of royal power forcefully predominate. However, even these bold *laukika* motifs pale in comparison with the multiarmed and royally bedecked images so prevalent in the traditions of north India. The important point to be grasped, therefore, is that the early iconographic traditions of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara are, on the whole, decidedly ascetic in orientation when seen within their total South Asian context. When compared with the Nātha Dēviyō sculptures of the late medieval Kandyan period, all of which are decidedly royal in appearance, Avalokiteśvara's shift in identity from an ascetic-oriented, Śaivite-influenced Mahāyāna bodhisattva to a popular Sinhala national guardian deity is clearly portrayed. For a dramatic comparison of this evolution, see Plates 11 and 29.

The early tendency to portray Avalokiteśvara more ascetically is further illustrated at Situlpahuva. Before the 1983 discovery of the Tiriyaya bronzes, the freestanding Situlpahuva sculpture (Plates 13 and 14), found among the ruins of an image house in the jungles of what is now part of Yala National Park, was considered to be possibly the earliest Avalokiteśvara image discovered on the island (Dohanian, 1977: 32). Again, no royal attributes are found in this icon, not even a coronet. This spectacular image has shown

physical noticeable deterioration in recent years due to the fact that it is currently standing unprotected from the tropical elements outside of a protected *budugē* cave (which, ironically, protects a very recent and gaudy giant reclining buddha). As a result, the symbol of Amitābha in the *jaṭāmakuṭa* is becoming less and less evident with the passage of time. Yet the image still remains remarkable, chiefly because it continues to evoke the senses of total poise and balance. There is a great similarity between the face of this image and the image from the Kandy Nātha Dēvālaya (Plate 16). Writing extensively about the style of this image several years ago, Dohanian stated:

> This style owes a lot to that last phase of the art of the Early Amaravatī period out of which it is ultimately the principal South Indian development. But the rich and undulating surface patterns and overripe attention to descriptive detail, which enliven the figures of Amaravatī, have here been subsumed within a plastic form of ultimate integrity. This plastic form is fashioned by an unbroken and enveloping surface from which the descriptive details emerge (and into which they sink) with a measured cadence identical to that of the self-compensating contours of the silhouette. The result is the transformation of effects into a compelling sobriety and stability of form, which is not static.
>
> The figure type of the Situlpavuva Avalokiteśvara corresponds to that of Śiva in the rear panel of the Trimūrti cave at Mamalapuram [Mahāballipuram] and its facial counterpart may be found a hundred times over on the Descent of the Ganges rock. The treatment of patterns of the hair and drapery folds—in spare, regular grooves and ridges—corresponds also to that of the Pallava style [33; brackets mine].

Noting that the consensus for dating the Mahāballipuram sculptures is the late seventh century, Dohanian [34] assigns this image to the very same time period while pointing out that apart from the Siṃhanāda Lokeśvara sculptural paradigm in the *Śadhanamālā*, only one other type of Avalokiteśvara image [noted by Mallman, 1948: 136], found in Mahārāstrā, is strictly of the ascetic orientation. When considered in light of the recent Tiriyaya finds, the Situlpahuva Avalokiteśvara confirms evidence of the early Sinhala tendency to portray Avalokiteśvara in the *lōkōttara* ascetic orientation.

The ascetic orientation is also clearly depicted in the massive rock-carved relief at Buduruvegala (some 30 miles to the northwest of Situlpahuva near modern Vällavaya). Here, seven colossal images have been delicately carved in a style reminiscent of the Pallava accomplishments in south India. In the center stands a buddha image (possibly of Dipānkara) 50 feet in height flanked on both sides by a trio of bodhisattva figures (see Plate 17). An ascetic-oriented Avalokiteśvara dominates the triad to the left of the giant standing buddha. He is accompanied by Tārā to the right and Sudhanakumāra

to the left. This imposing Avalokiteśvara (see Plate 18) is superbly described by Dohanian in the following way:

> The Bodhisattva stands erect and raises both hands in the kaṭaka mudrā. He wears a dhoti which falls to the ankles and is held in place by multiple cords wound around the hips and clasped together with an ornamental clasp. Two ribbonlike forms falls sinuously from this arrangement along the left thigh to the knee. This part of the costume is similar to that of the Situlpavuva Avalokiteśvara even though the schema of its rendition is different. The upper torso of the Bodhisattva is bare; there are no ornaments and no yajñopavīta. The hair is drawn up in a massive jaṭāmakuṭa; an ornamental niche with a gem-studded border encloses the figure of the Dhyāni Buddha. A coronet encircles the jaṭā and loose tresses from it fall on the shoulders. The figure had been covered with a layer of light plaster in which wavy ridges had been modelled to suggest the fall of drapery.
>
> The over-all shape of the Buduruvegala colossus is strikingly reminiscent of the Situlpavuva stone image. And the face presents a slightly harder and broader version of the same forms. . . .
>
> But, . . . this colossal image cannot be dated earlier than around 900 A.D. It must be regarded as a late survival of the Pallava-Sinhalese styles of the seventh and eighth centuries [40–41].

The influence of Pallava culture is also reflected graphically in the rock-cut relief images popularly known as the "man and the horse" at Isurumeṇu in Anuradhapura (see Plate 19). Coomaraswamy was the first to note the great stylistic affinities of the Isurumeṇu relief of the "man and a horse" with the gigantic "Descent of the Ganges" at Mahāballipuram in Tamilnadu. Very tentatively, he identified the anthropomorphic image as that of the epic sage-seer Kapilamuṇi [Perera, 1978: 6]. Paranavitana [1971] later believed that the same image was that of the Vedic rain deity Parjanya, while more recently van Lohuizen-de Leeuw [1965] argued that the image is that of Aiyaṉār (on the basis of the presence of the horse, the symbol most chiefly associated with this popular south Indian god who, as we noted in Chapter 1, is still venerated in many villages in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka today). Perera [18–25], however, stressing that images of Kuan Yin (Avalokiteśvara) in China are frequently found in the very same variant position of the *rāja-līlāsana,* argues that the relief is really that of Avalokiteśvara and his "satellite" Hayagrīva. Perera's argument throughout is somewhat strained. But it does devolve into an interesting, albeit complicated, speculation about how the origins of Aiyaṉār and Avalokiteśvara derived from the same cult of a south Indian ascetic mountain deity. Indeed, Hiuen-tsang located Avalokiteśvara's mountainous abode, Mount Potalaka, to the "south" [Taranatha,

1970: 141], and Ramachandran [1954: 12] has placed a good deal of credibility in this interesting possibility. Aside from the speculative identification of the anthropomorphic figure, the fact remains that the Isurumeṇu image is very clearly in basic conformity with the great Pallava accomplishments at Mahāballipuram. (If we were to enter this speculative debate regarding the identification of the Isurumeṇu figures, and dare to grant Perera the chance that Avalokiteśvara is indeed represented here, the horse's identity makes more sense as the winged steed Balāha of the *Avalokiteśvara-Guṇa-Karaṇḍavyūha-sūtra,* rather than Hayagrīva.)

As mysterious as the identifications in the Isurumeṇu relief may be, the reasons for Pallava cultural influence in Sri Lanka at this time are not so difficult to determine. As long as Buddhism was a dynamic religious tradition in India, many ties were continuously forged and sustained by interaction between the Sinhalese and their mainland counterparts. Buddha Gaya remained an important destination for Sinhalese Buddhist pilgrims throughout the early medieval period, and the fame of Anuradhapura's monasteries attracted Buddhists, as we have seen, not only from throughout India but from China as well. Ties between the Sinhalese and the Buddhist community in Tamilnadu were especially strong. The great fifth-century B.C. commentator Buddhaghosha, who seems to have come to Sri Lanka from south India and whose lengthy exposition on the *dhamma* (the *Visuddhimagga*) became doctrinally normative, is a prime example. Many other interchanges between Anuradhapura and Kanchipuram and Kāveripāṭṭaṇam are also easily documented. We have also noted that the Abhayagiri fraternity in Anuradhapura had apparently established a branch in Java [De Casparis, 1961: 241–48], a fact that seems substantiated by emergent similarities in the comparative iconographic representation of Avalokiteśvara [Paranavitana, 1971: 138]. These artistic similarities between insular Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka point to a common source of religious and cultural inspiration: south Indian Pallava culture. Indeed, these three regions may have constituted a veritable "cultural triangle" from the seventh into the ninth century. Of greatest cultural importance to the period from the seventh through the tenth centuries was the political link established between the fortunes of the Pallava Empire and Sri Lanka. Because of this link, Pallava cultural influence flowed rapidly into Sri Lanka. It is worth describing this general situation, as it provides an explanation for the emergence of Pallava sculptural traditions within the context of early medieval Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka. In addition, this explanation implies that the cult of Avalokiteśvara may have spread from south India to Sri Lanka and Śrī Vijaya in Southeast Asia at about the same time.

In politically unsettled seventh-century Sri Lanka, the royal family of Prince Mānavamma was forced to flee the island, seeking refuge in the court



Plate 1. Avalokiteśvara sits on *padmāsana* in *rājalīlāsana* with right hand in *varaḍa mudrā.* Eighth century A.D., bronze, 4½ inches, Tiriyaya. (Photo by Ulrich von Schroeder)



Plate 2. Avalokiteśvara sits in *rājalīlāsana* with right hand in *kaṭaka mudrā.* Eighth century A.D., bronze, 4 inches, Tiriyaya. (Photo by Ulrich von Schroeder)

Plate 3. Avalokiteśvara sits in *rājalīlāsana*. Eighth century A.D., bronze, 4 inches, Tiriyaya. (Photo by Ulrich von Schroeder)





Plate 4. Avalokiteśvara sits in *rājalīlāsana*. Eighth century A.D., bronze, 5½ inches, Tiriyaya. (Photo by Ulrich von Schroeder)



Plate 5. Avalokiteśvara stands surveying the world compassionately. Eighth century A.D., bronze, 8 inches, Tiriyaya. (Photo by Ulrich von Schroeder)



Plate 6. Avalokiteśvara surveys the world. Eighth century A.D., bronze, 8 inches, Tiriyaya. (Photo by Ulrich von Schroeder)

Plate 7. Royally bedecked Mañjuśrī or Avalokiteśvara combines *samādhi* and preaching postures. Eighth century A.D., bronze, 5 inches, Tiriyaya. (Photo by Ulrich von Schroeder)





Plate 8. Kuṣṭharājagala (possibly Avalokiteśvara) bears five *dhyāni* buddhas within his *jaṭāmakuṭa*. Ninth century A.D., stone, 12 feet, Väligama. (Photo courtesy of the Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka)



Plate 9. Tārā cast in standing posture. Eighth century A.D., bronze, Tiriyaya. (Photo courtesy of the Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka)



late 10. Tārā sits in *rājalīlāsana* on *admāsana*. Eighth century A.D., bronze, 5 ıches, Tiriyaya. (Photo by Ulrich von chroeder)

Plate 11. Ascetic-oriented Avalokiteśvara in full *samādhi* position. Eighth century A.D., bronze, 4½ inches, Anuradhapura. (Photo by Ulrich von Schroeder)





Plate 12. Avalokiteśvara sits in *rājalīlāsana.* Eighth or ninth century A.D., bronze, 4½ inches, Anuradhapura. Ross-Coomaraswamy Collection. (Photo courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

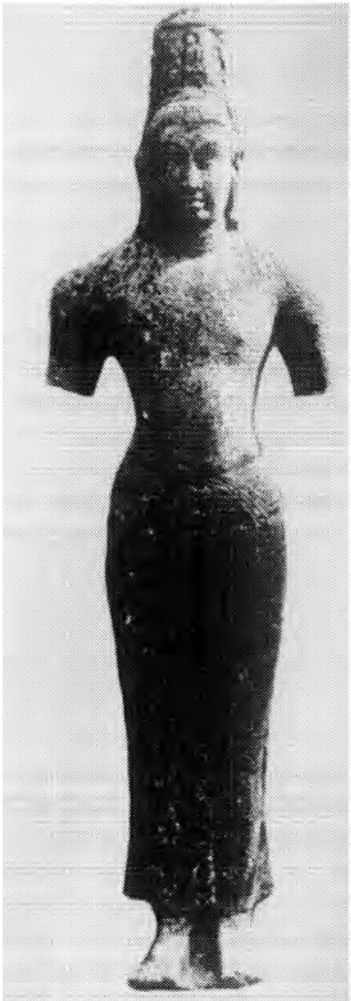


Plate 13. Freestanding Avalokiteśvara remains at Situlpahuva in Yala National Park. Eighth century A.D., stone, 8 feet. (Photo courtesy of the Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka)



Plate 14. Close-up photo of freestanding Avalokiteśvara at Situlpahuva (Plate 13). Stone. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)



Plate 15. Avalokiteśvara sits in *rājalīlāsana*. Eighth century A.D., bronze, 2½ feet, Veheragala, Anuradhapura district. (Photo courtesy of the Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka)

Plate 16. Avalokiteśvara (alias Nātha Dēviyō) sits in *rājalīlāsana* within the sanctum sanctorum of the Kandy Nātha Dēvālaya. Ninth century A.D., bronze, 2 feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)

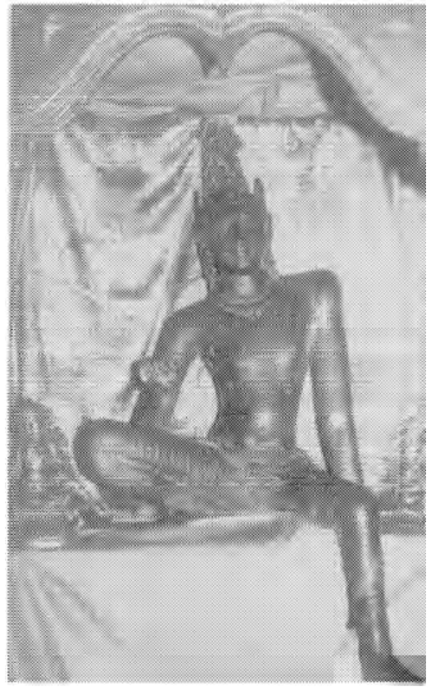




Plate 17. Seven bodhisattvas stand at Buduruvegala. In the center stands the Buddha Dipānkara flanked by two trios dominated on the left by Avalokitēśvara and on the right by Maitreya. Stone, central image stands 39 feet. (Photo courtesy of the Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka)



Plate 18. Avalokiteśvara stands at Buduruvegala. Stone, approximately 20 feet. (Photo courtesy of the Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka)

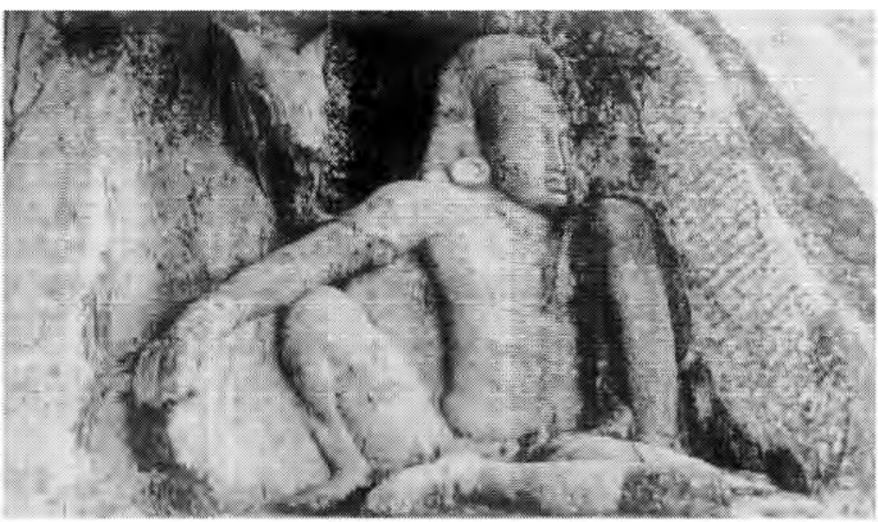


Plate 19. Enigmatic "man and his horse" at Isurumeṇu defies a conclusive identification. Eighth or ninth century A.D., stone, 4 feet, Anuradhapura. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)

Plate 20. Head from eighth or ninth century A.D. Avalokiteśvara freestanding image from Ambalantota. Stone, 1 foot, 2 inches. (Photo courtesy of the Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka)





Plate 21. Head from massive Avalokiteśvara now being restored at Maligawila. Ninth or tenth century A.D., stone, 33 feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)



Plate 22. Avalokiteśvara (alias Nātha Dēviyō) stands with *abhaya mudrā* in the sanctum sanctorum of the Pasgama Nātha Dēvālaya in the Kandyan highlands. Fifteenth century A.D., sandalwood, 8 feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)



Plate 23. Tārā (alias Pattinī) stands with *abhaya mudrā* by the side of Avalokiteśvara in the sanctum sanctorum of the Pasgama Nātha Dēvālaya. Fifteenth century A.D., sandalwood, 7½ feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)

Plate 24. Avalokiteśvara (alias Nātha Dēviyō) sits in *rājalīlāsana* while expressing *abhaya mudrā* in the sanctum sanctorum of the Vegiriya Nātha Dēvālaya near Gampola. Fourteenth or fifteenth century A.D., clay and plaster, 5 feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)





Plate 25. Tārā (alias Bīsō Baṇḍāra) accompanies Avalokiteśvara in the sanctum sanctorum of the Vegiriya Nātha Dēvālaya. Fourteenth or fifteenth century A.D., clay and plaster, 5 feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)



Plate 26. Freestanding Avalokiteśvara (alias Nātha Dēviyō) flanks the left side of the Buddha while Maitreya stands on the right side at Dambulla cave (#2). Eighteenth century A.D., marble, 9 feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)



Plate 27. Maitreya opposite Avalokiteśvara (Plate 26) at Dambulla cave (#2). Eighteenth century A.D., marble, 9 feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)

Plate 28. (Nā) Avalokiteśvara image stands alone in the Hunapahura Nātha Dēvālaya. Seventeenth or eighteenth century A.D., ironwood, 9 feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)





Plate 29. Avalokiteśvara (alias Nātha Dēviyō) is located only 400 yards from the Hunapahura Nātha Dēvālaya at Urulevatte. (Eighteenth century A.D., clay and plaster, 5 feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)



Plate 30. Avalokiteśvara (alias Nātha Dēviyō) at Talgahagoda has a painted *dhyāni* buddha in a *stūpa* crown. Seventeenth or eighteenth century A.D., clay and plaster. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)



Plate 31. Close-up photo of Avalokiteśvara's crown at Talgahagoda. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)



Plate 32. Nātha (now identified as Maitreya) at Ridi Vihāra. Eighteenth century A.D., clay and plaster, 9 feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)



Plate 33. Avalokiteśvara (alias Nātha, alias Maitreya) guards the entry to the *budugē* of the Nāga Rājamahāvihāra in Sri Jayawardhanapura. Eighteenth or nineteenth century A.D., stucco and clay, 16 feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)



Plate 34. Nātha (alias Maitreya) at Ampitiye has a *stūpa* without *dhyāni* buddha in the crown. Nineteenth century A.D., plaster and clay, 8 feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)



Plate 35. Nātha (alias Maitreya) at Bellanwila reflects the plastic influence of Roman Catholic iconography yet retains his *dhyāni* buddha in the crown. Mid-twentieth century, plaster and clay, 8 feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)



Plate 36. Saman Dēviyō image borrows iconographic features from Nātha at Issurumuniya in Anuradhapura. 1983, clay and plaster. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)



Plate 37. Close-up photo of head of Saman Dēviyō at Issurumuniya in Anuradhapura (Plate 36) indicates the appropriation of Avalokiteśvara's buddha in the crown. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)

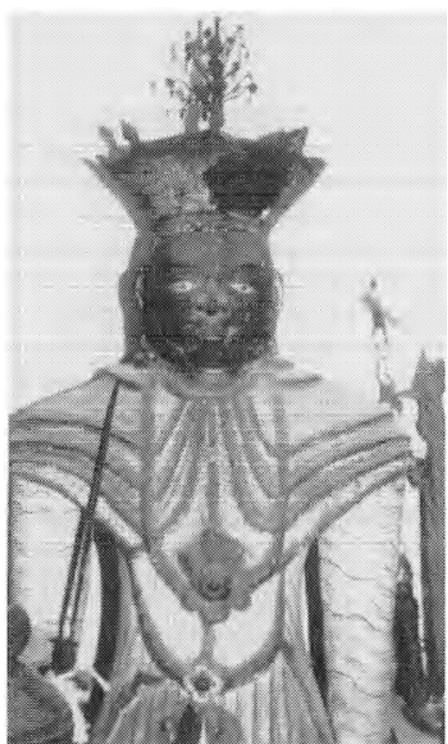


Plate 38. Piṭiye Dēviyō in the sanctum sanctorum of his dēvālaya in Gunnepana reflects the royal imagery of the Kandyan period. Eighteenth century A.D., clay and plaster, 7 feet. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)

of Narasiṃhavarman I, the great Pallava sovereign. Several years later, Mānavamma apparently accompanied Narasiṃhavarman into battle against the Vallabhas (Chālukyas) when the former were decisively defeated (ca. A.D. 642) [Geiger, 1953, vol. 1: 104–5], a battle that established effective Pallava control throughout much of south India. The *Cūlavaṃsa* reports that, out of gratitude, Narasiṃhavarman provided Mānavamma with soldiers and naval resources to recapture Sri Lanka some several years later. After falling ill in his initial attempt to regain suzerainty, Mānavamma eventually successfully defeated Potthakuṭṭha (a Tamil usurper who had succeeded Mānavamma's Sinhalese rivals) in about 684 [Dohanian: 13]. The *Culavaṃsa* [Geiger, 1953, vol. 1: 109] reports rather fantastically that Mānavamma reigned for a full 35 years following his final success. If this were so, Mānavamma must have lived to be extremely old, as his original flight to India probably took place in the late 620s. Nevertheless, the *Cūlavaṃsa* reports that Mānavamma's sons (Aggabodhi V [718–724], Kassapa III [724–730], and Mahinda I [730–733]), all of whom sustained their father's reestablished dynasty not only had shared their formative exilic years in the court of Narasiṃhavarman but were actually born in India. It is only natural, then, that Pallava cultural and political influence would have become quite strong in Sri Lanka during the reign of these Sinhalese but culturally and politically dominated Pallava kings. Indeed, this period of Sinhalese history, beginning in the early eighth century and continuing well into the ninth, witnessed largely unsuccessful attempts at the centralization of royal power patterned after the Pallava administrative model. Perhaps during this time of relatively weak central rule from the capital a remarkable cultural renaissance occurred in the capital to create the appearance of strength and vitality. During this time, the sculptures and inscriptions already discussed in this chapter as well as the massive rock-cut standing buddhas at Aukana and Sasseruwa were carved. This was a period in which more and more exaggerated royal claims to power were being proclaimed, including the proclamation that the kings of Lanka were the "defenders of the bowl and the robe" [*Epigraphia Zeylanica,* vol. 1: 234–37], a claim that would seem to have been the result of kings desiring "to free their legitimacy from the mediation of the sangha" [Dohanian: 14]. This would only seem natural for kings not firmly esconced in Theravāda traditions.

In fact, the fortunes of Sinhalese Sri Lanka became so intertwined with the political fate of the Pallavas that when the latter were finally dislodged by Chola power in the closing years of the ninth century, Sri Lanka's fate of subjugation to Chola power was all but sealed, marking the end of a golden era of Anuradhapura culture. Chola princes continuously invaded Sri Lanka until its cataclysmic destruction and annexation in the last decade of the tenth century. These invasions marked the beginning of the end of the widespread

Mahāyāna cult per se in Buddhist Sri Lanka, for the religious orientation of the Cholas was thoroughly Śaivite. The Mahāvihāra suffered enervation as well, owing chiefly to a lack of lay patronage. There is, however, evidence indicating that the Cholas tolerated the continued presence of Malaysian (Śrī Vijaya) *tantric*s in Nāgapāṭṭaṇam, and we shall see that the cult of Avalokiteśvara survived in modified fashion in the remote interior of Sri Lanka. In summarizing the Pallava era, Dohanian states:

> The intermeshing of the political fortunes of the kings of Ceylon, from the seventh through the tenth centuries, with those of the South Indian rivals for imperial power and domination, gives some indication of the cultural interdependence of Ceylon and the South Indian dominions at this time, and suggests the extent to which Ceylon participated in the brilliant civilisational accomplishments of the era [16].

The cultural link at this time between Southeast Asia (Śrī Vijaya), south India, and Sri Lanka is further indicated by the spectacular archaeological finds at Nāgapaṭṭaṇam on the Indian coast due east of Tanjore. Nearly 350 Buddhist bronzes had been discovered at this site by the mid-1950s (and massive bronze images of Avalokiteśvara created as late as the eighteenth century in Nāgapāṭṭaṇam can still be seen today in the Madras Government Museum). While many of the Nāgapāṭṭaṇam Avalokiteśvara bronzes reflect later concessions to elements of Śaivite Chola Hindu iconography [see, for instance, Ramachandran: Plate 28, Figure 1, which represents Avalokiteśvara in a manner very similar to Śiva Nātarāja], there are numerous examples of Avalokiteśvara bronzes very similar in style and attributes to those found in contemporaneous Sri Lanka [Ramachandran: Plate 9, Figure 1] dating to the eighth century. The international influence of Pallava-styled sculpture is a thoroughly rehearsed theme in the history of south Asian art, but the finds at Nāgapāṭṭaṇam indicate that even *after* the fall of the Pallavas and the rise of the Cholas, extensive cultural and commercial intercourse continued to be realized between the three regions. Ramachandran notes:

> As the result of maritime commerce between Eastern India and the Malaya peninsula, there existed at Nāgapāṭṭaṇam, in the days of the Cholas (871–1250 A.D.), a colony of Malay Buddhists, particularly from Srīvijaya who appear to have given a new lease of life to the declining Buddhism of South India by erecting Buddhist temples at Nāgapāṭṭaṇam with the aid of subsidies granted by their kings, the Sailendras. Being [also] patronized by the Chola monarchs, they built at least two temples at the beginning of the eleventh century. These temples were called "Rājarāja-perum-paḷḷi" and Rājendra-Coḷa-perum-paḷḷi. . . . The former was named after Rājarāja I, . . . was evidently the chapel of a *vihāra* . . . [with a] tower of three storeys which had for long served as a landmark for vessels approaching the Nāgapāṭṭaṇam roadstead, and was [also]

> known as the "Puduveli gopuram" or the "China pagoda" . . . which was pulled down by French Jesuits in 1867 A.D. . . . Such storeyed temples being unknown in South India, while they prevailed in a large measure in Java and other isles of the Archipelago, it may be presumed that it derived its architecture from either a Sumatran or Javanese temple [13–14].

Ramachandran continues by describing the close commercial relations that obtained between the Śrī Vijaya and the Cholas until 1025, when Rājendra Chola attempted to conquer Śrī Vijaya. During this time, the *tantr*ic-based Buddhist culture of Śrī Vijaya, nourished by the Sailendras in the eighth and ninth centuries, continued to thrive. There, Avalokiteśvara Lokanātha was popularly and royally venerated as "Lord of the world," and the king was regarded as his earthly manifestation and human counterpart. It was precisely this cult that became the basis for the later emergence of the Buddharāja cult under Jayavarman VII at Angkor in thirteenth-century Cambodia. The 350 bronzes discovered in Nāgapāṭṭaṇam all date to this post-Pallava period and provide evidence of the fact that the kings of Śrī Vijaya continued to seek commercial contact with India and to provide subsistence for their Buddhist expatriates living and working on the subcontinent, especially on the south Indian coast.

The bronzes from Nāgapāṭṭaṇam dating from this post-Pallava period represent a further evolution of style. Compared with Pallava sculpture, the facial features of Nāgapāṭṭaṇam bronzes are more refined and narrowed, while the torsos and legs have become more elongated and sinuous. Numerous Avalokiteśvara standing bronzes are represented in a fashion very similar to the famous Śiva Nātarāja and Parvati sculptures from Chola Thanjavur [see Ramachandran: Plates 7, 28, 33]. Others, however, such as the Nāgapāṭṭaṇam Siṃhanāda Lokeśvara [Ramachandran: Plate 9, Figure 1], retain the fullness of Pallava style.

These developments in style are also reflected in Sri Lanka, for it is precisely a mix of earlier Pallava and later Nāgapāṭṭaṇam styles that characterizes the magnificent Avalokiteśvara/Nātha Dēviyō icon found today within the Kandy Nātha Dēvālaya (see Plate 16). Here, the facial features are refined and narrowed, indicating the influence of Chola Thanjavur, but the attributes also express the more ascetically oriented Avalokiteśvara icons of the earlier Pallava-dominated period. The coronet is similar to Coomaraswamy's miniature Avalokiteśvara now at Boston (Plate 11) and, except for the Amitābha figure in the *jaṭāmakuṭa,* is almost identical to the Veheragala image (Plate 15).

In 1983, a new *kapurāla* took over ritual duties at the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya,* and I was fortunate to become, I understand, the first scholar to photograph this image. Soon after, the UNESCO/Sri Lanka archaeological

project removed the image and took several photos; subsequently, Mudiyanse [1985] described this icon as follows:

> The deity is seated in *mahārāja-līlā,* and measures about 18 inches in height from the pedestal. The left leg is allowed to hang down while the right is drawn in and placed on the seat. The left arm is broken above the elbow and the whereabouts of the missing portion are not known. Of the remaining portion, a crack is visible about its middle. The right arm is placed on the right leg and shows an open palm depicting a *mudrā* (a gesture) which is open to conjecture. As in the colossal image of Avalokiteśvara at Buduruvegala, here the thumb and index finger are joined in the attitude of explaining a subtle point of the doctrine. The remaining three fingers are bent towards the palm. Above the waist, the body is bare except for the necklace which is woven in two tiers. With regard to its designs and craftsmanship, only a closer inspection can reveal details. From the ankles upwards, the deity is shown as wearing a kind of drapery (fixed at the waist with a belt and a girdle), showing regular folds at intervals. A similar dress is shown in the images of deities at Lankatilaka-vihāra in Hamdesa (Sri Lanka). The head dress is of an exquisite character, complicated in design and shows a figure of Dhyāni Buddha Amitābha in it. A sculpture in bronze, discovered in 1968 at the Veheragala monastery in Mihintale (Sri Lanka), shows identical features (but without an effigy of a Dhyāni Buddha in the head dress). The latter may be datable to about the 9th or 10th century, but the former, of which no history is available, appears to be of a later date. Our guess is the 14th century, which is roughly the date of the architectural monument [106].

Mudiyanse's "guess" could have been better, given his depth of knowledge about the art of medieval Lanka. A comparison of the Kandy Nātha Dēvālaya's Avalokiteśvara icon with other Kandyan Avalokiteśvara-Nātha images dating to the fifteenth century at nearby Pasgama (see Plates 22 and 23) and Vegiriya (see Plate 24) reveal no similarities in substance or style. Nor does the comparison of drapery with images at Lankatilaka seem to bear much weight. Rather, the Avalokiteśvara image at the Kandy Nātha Dēvālaya, as Mudiyanse has rightly pointed out, is almost identical in substance and style to the Veheragala icon (see Plate 15), which has been dated to the eighth or ninth century. Given the fact that with the Chola invasions the *tantr*ic cults of Sri Lanka at the beginning of the second millenium waned considerably, that other Avalokiteśvara/Nātha images created in the Kandyan region in the fourteenth century are so different in style and substance, and that the Veheragala Avalokiteśvara is almost identical to the image in question, it would seem more reasonable to suggest that the icon is probably of ninth- or tenth-century origins. This view also seems to be substantiated by the fact that this Avalokiteśvara icon, like most icons from the early medieval period, is thoroughly ascetic in orientation, while every image of Avalokiteśvara/Nātha from the

Gampola period (fourteenth century) to the present is predominantly royal in style and attributes, thus reflecting the transformation of the deity as a divine power assisting Sinhala kings in the preservation of Lanka's mission. As such, the Avalokiteśvara icon of the Kandy Nātha Dēvālaya is one of the last images of the early medieval period to survive.[3] Since its totality bears an uncanny resemblance to the Veheragala image and its face seems so similar to the Sithupahuwa stone image, the earlier dating seems more justified. It was probably transported to its current site when the *dēvālaya* was originally constructed in the fourteenth century. We shall have more to say about this in the following chapter.

The Iconography of Avalokiteśvara/Nātha in Late Medieval Kandyan Culture

The iconographic traditions of Avalokiteśvara as Nātha Dēviyō in the Kandyan cultural area bear a strong resemblance to royalty, owing to the fact that the iconography of the figure was modified to suit his new role as a protective deity, the issue we shall address directly in Chapter 4. At Pasgama, for instance, life-size images of Nātha and Tārā (see Plates 22 and 23) now in the sanctum sanctorum of the *dēvālaya* are dressed in the finery of royal clothes. *Stūpa*s have replaced the *jaṭāmakuṭa*s of the earlier period, and sandalwood covered with stucco has been used instead of bronze. The images are now badly deteriorated, but the distinctive embedded Buddha Amitābha miniature is still quite visible above the forehead of the Nātha figure (see Plate 22). The hands of both the Tārā and the Avalokiteśvara images have been broken off, and crudely fashioned replacements have been appended by means of nails. It would seem that the *abhaya mudrā*s of both images probably reflect the original hand positions. The paint on both images is badly worn, but enough is left to indicate that the Nātha image is wearing a leopard-skin skirt. Nātha is here bedecked with royal necklaces, rosary, and arm bands. Both images stand rigid and fixed. The fluid contours of the earlier Pallava style are missing, and the finery of facial features from the Chola period are absent. Indeed, the faces of both images are full and fleshy, almost plump. These icons, therefore, are clearly products of the early period of Kandyan folk art. Their appearance rests more on simplicity and charm.

The Nātha and Tārā images at Vegiriya Nātha Dēvālaya (see Plates 24 and 25) were probably fashioned in the late fourteenth century. A Sinhala inscription carved into a rock on the *dēvālaya* grounds is dated to the early years of the fifteenth century, recording donations to the *dēvālaya* of various kings during the Gampola era (1341–1415). Both images are sculpted out of stucco.

While the Tārā image gestures in the *abhaya mudrā,* the Nātha image is in the *vitarka mudrā* and the *rājalīlāsana.* In the Nātha icon, the embedded image of Amitābha in the front of the *stūpa* is missing, although originally it may have been painted into the niche that seems to have been provided for it. The only adornment of this image, aside from the folds in the princely pants, are two jeweled arm bands. Again, the figures are stiff, especially through the shoulders and neck, a style shared by buddha images and images of deities found at nearby Gadaladeniya and Lankatilaka made during the same cultural period. Like the Pasgama images, the faces here are fleshy and the features very full. The earlobes of Nātha are like those of a *mahāpuruṣa,* representing a preservation of that particular bodhisattva motif.

No images of Avalokiteśvara/Nātha from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries are known to have survived. This may be one of the unfortunate negative legacies of the Portuguese. In addition, no known images of Tārā seemed to have been created at all after the fifteenth century. Eighteenth-century images of Nātha are now found at Dambulla and at Hunapahura.

The history of the famous caves at Dambulla located between Kandy and Anuradhapura is quite complex, and we need not delve into its many details.[4] According to tradition, these caves were first consecrated by King Valagambāhu (Vaṭṭagāmaṇī) in the first century B.C. Legend has it that they were restored by Niśśanka Malla in the last years of the twelfth century. *Vihāra tupatas* from the eighteenth century indicate that a Nātha image (see Plate 26) was constructed by Kīrtti Śrī Rājasinha (1747–1781) in the *mahārājalena* ("cave temple of the great king"). Anuradha Seneviratna [1983a: 54] notes that this Nātha image stands in the *samapadabhanga* position with the right hand in the *vitarka mudrā* while the left is in the *katala mudrā.* The image is situated to the left side of a standing buddha, which is also accompanied by a statue of Metteyya on its right (see Plate 27). The presence of both Nātha and Metteyya in the same trio indicates that at least by the time of the eighteenth century, their identities had yet to be fused and their roles as protector and future realizer of the *dhamma,* respectively, continued to be known separately.[5] The coronet of the Nātha image is fashioned to resemble a lotus, while the *jaṭāmakuṭa* contains a lightly embedded Amitābha figure. The hands have been painted and the earlobes elongated to signify a *mahāpuruṣa.* The *dhoti* is thoroughly royal. Bracelets, arm bands, necklaces, and *yajñopavīta* adorn the arms and torso. The facial features are full, with the nose shaped in the hucked manner characteristic of late medieval south Indian sculpture. The statue stands some 9 feet in height in accordance with the prescriptions of the *Śariputra.* In this sculpture, the *laukika* orientation of the bodhisattva/king is unrepressed.

The Nātha image of Hunapahura Nātha Dēvālaya (see Plate 28) seems to

date from the very same period. This massive 9-foot sculpture, carved out of the wood of the Nā (ironwood) tree, has been recently painted white, as have a number of other Nātha images found in village temples throughout the North Central Province.[6] What is striking about this image is that the style of coronet so clearly reflected in the eighth- and ninth-century icons from Veheragala (Plate 15), the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya* (Plate 16), and Coomaraswamy's miniature now in Boston (Plate 12) was again reproduced after a lapse of some 9 or 10 centuries. In addition, the *mudrā* is wholly distinctive. Like the Dambulla Nātha, this image is bedecked by royal bracelets, arm bands, necklaces, and *yajñopavīta*. Amitābha is clearly reflected in the carved *jaṭāmakuṭa*.

At the nearby Urulevatte Nātha Dēvālaya located about a quarter of mile to the southwest of Hunapahura in the face of the same cliff, another image of Nātha (see Plate 29), this one of stucco, dates to the late eighteenth century. Here the motifs are even more royally oriented. The *yajñopavīta* appears as more of a sash, and jewels are found in the necklace, arm bands, and extended ear lobes. The facial features are noticeably more benign. A small bronze Amitābha has been embedded in the *jaṭāmakuṭa*.

The images at Hunapahura reflect some degree of independence from the traditions of Nātha statues found in other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century royally supported Kandy monastic *vihāras*. This is most clearly seen in the use of paints and lacquer as well as in the symbolism of the headdress. In the icons represented in Plates 32 and 33, from nearby Ridi Vihāra and from Nāga Rājamahāvihāra (in Kotte), and in Plate 34, from a minor *vihāraya* in Ampitiye near Kandy, we find that the *stūpa* has fully replaced the *jaṭāmakuṭa*, a development that may reflect the popular conflation of Nātha with Maitrī, since the *stūpa* had been Maitrī's headdress for many centuries.[7] In fact, these images are rather typical of Nātha images found throughout Sri Lanka dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In many of these icons, even the *dhyāni* buddha Amitābha in the crown is missing. In the massive 16-foot image from Nāga Rājamahāvihāra (Plate 33), Amitābha has been painted on the headdress. It is clear that in the latest period of traditional sculpture, the royal motifs predominate to such an extent that the bodhisattva nature of Nātha has almost been completely subsumed.

Finally, a Nātha statue from Bellanwila (see Plate 35), created in the 1930s, reflects the influence of popular Roman Catholic iconography. This glossy image shines with fleshy this-worldliness. Here, absolutely no hints of asceticism remain. Nātha is portrayed as a young princely figure holding a lotus in the right hand. The lotus and the painted effigy of Amitābha are the only concessions to his bodhisattva origins. The facsimile ruby pendant on his chest and the facsimile sapphire beneath his belt are graphic indications of his

orientation to this-world. The *yajnopavīta* has been replaced by a nondescript blue sash. The statue is a clear statement that god Nātha will eventually become a buddha, but he is clearly still on the path. Avalokiteśvara as he was known in early medieval times has clearly vanished.

Discussion of the iconographic traditions of Avalokiteśvara and Nātha reflects visually the manner in which this Mahāyāna bodhisattva/Sinhala guardian deity was artfully portrayed throughout the history of Sinhala religious iconographic tradition. In many ways, the icons we have selectively noted are visual indices to the political and cultural assimilations and transformations taking place on the island from the seventh through the twentieth centuries. In this chapter, we have endeavored to illustrate visually that this particular assimilation and transformation reflected a general shift from *lōkōttara* to *laukika* orientations, a shift in identity from the ascetic orientation of Mahāyāna Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara to the royal orientation of Sinhala national guardian deity Nātha.

What remains for us now is to fill in this outline with pertinent discussions of politics, mythology, and ritual, all of which reflect the thorough and conscious manner in which Avalokiteśvara became an important and thoroughly domesticated religious figure in Sinhala Buddhism. To do this, we must retrace our steps and return to a discussion of late medieval Sinhala political history and culture.

4

The Politics of Deification in Medieval Sri Lanka: Avalokiteśvara Becomes Nātha Dēviyō

Iconographic and epigraphic evidence indicates the cultic presence of Avalokiteśvara from the seventh through the tenth centuries A.D. in Sri Lanka, but the Mahāyāna bodhisattva was not incorporated into the Sinhala Buddhist sociopolitical cosmos until the fourteenth century. When that domestication occurred during the late medieval Gampola era (A.D. 1341–1415), it resulted in the transformation of Avalokiteśvara's identity. Thereafter, Avalokiteśvara was known in Sri Lanka almost exclusively as Nātha, a shortened form of one of his best-known epithets, Lokeśvara Nātha. Though the bodhisattva's original identity was soon forgotten, Nātha eventually became a powerful national deity of political legitimation in the up-country Kandyan capital during the ensuing centuries, the epitome of *laukika* efficacy. In following chapters, we shall ferret out the this-worldly religious significance of Nātha's cult by examining mythic and ritual remnants still contemporary in a handful of outlying villages in the Kandyan cultural area today, as well as at his surviving central *dēvālaya* (the oldest building in the city of Kandy) standing opposite the famous *Daḷadā Māligāva* ("Temple of the Tooth"). In the present chapter, however, we will again trace the evolving fortunes of Avalokiteśvara diachronically, this time in relation to medieval Sinhala political history, noting in particular his role in relation to kingship.

The fourteenth century A.D. of Sinhala history was a period of political and economic atrophy. The magnificent capital at Polonnaruva in the northern dry

zone had been abandoned for the last time in the final decade of the thirteenth century, and a strategically defensive retreat, or "drift to the southwest," commenced, with new Sinhala capitals subsequently founded and lost: first at Dambadeniya but then at Yapahuva, Kurunegala, Dedigama, and Gampola. The political fortunes of the Sinhalese were not revived until the 15-century reign of Parākramabāhu VI (a.d. 1415–1467) at Kotte (just southeast of modern Colombo).

Moreover, the wider political evolution of Sri Lanka from the early-thirteenth-century sacking of Polonnaruva through the intrigue-plagued establishment of the Kandyan kingdom in the late sixteenth century was an extraordinarily complex turmoil. Not only did several political fragmentations and foreign invasions splinter and further limit Sinhala hegemony, but unprecedented cultural assimilations occurred throughout various levels of Sinhala society as well. In the context of this social and political fluidity, Sinhala Buddhism incorporated a number of Hindu and Mahāyāna religiocultural and political forms. Indeed, the apotheosis of the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara into the Sinhala guardian deity Nātha Dēviyō in the fourteenth century and his subsequent rise in importance during the early Kotte era mirror the larger political and cultural processes at work during this time period. The Gampola period, in particular, was an era of great transition and transformation, which, while politically enervated, subsequently gave rise to the manifold religiocultural creativity of the fifteenth century during the powerful reign of Parākramabāhu VI at Kotte.

Parākramabāhu VI was the only political ruler of any nationality (including the European Portuguese, Dutch, and British) who actually exercised complete political and military control over the entire island from the early Polonnaruva period until the final subjugation of the Kandyan kingdom by the British in 1815. Despite his great power, he held Sri Lanka completely for only 15 or 20 years (during the latter part of his reign). Under his long tenure at Kotte, Sinhala culture experienced renewed inspirations rarely seen since the days of Parākramabāhu's original namesake at Polonnaruva during the twelfth century. Though the Theravāda monastic tradition was formally supported by this powerful Sinhala state, it would be inaccurate to understand the vivified religious and cultural expressions of the Kotte period as a Theravāda Buddhist revival per se, for significant elements of the Buddhist *sangha* and Sinhala society seem to have been deeply impressed by Mahāyāna Buddhist conceptions of the bodhisattva/king, devotional forms of Hindu piety, and emergent forms of magical and medical practice. It seems only fitting, then, that the political integration of the island under Parākramabāhu VI would be accompanied by the institutionalization of concomitant religiocultural assimilations as well.

The forceful effect of these assimilations was as diffuse as it has been long lasting. Indeed, the religious culture of contemporary up-country Kandyan Sinhalese owes many of its fundamental structures and much of its substance to the remarkable transformations occurring during the fourteenth-century Gampola period, transformations that were solidified and further enriched during the reign of Parākramabāhu VI at Kotte in the fifteenth century. Had the Portuguese not begun to interfere with the Sinhala court at Kotte in the sixteenth century, it is likely that Hindu religious and social influences would have continued to mount such that the effect on Sinhala culture might have been even more profound than it was.

The religious transformations that occurred during the fourteenth-century Gampola era presage the impressive cultural achievements of Parākramabāhu VI's Kotte era and their subsequent expression in the later Kandyan period. They constitute the general focus of this chapter. Specifically, the primary focus is upon religious conceptions associated with Avalokiteśvara/Nātha that were expressed in the literature, epigraphy, architecture, and iconography of fourteenth-century Gampola, conceptions that eventually came to be embedded within later medieval Kandyan culture, many of which still survive today.

Political Dynamics and Religious Legitimation in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries

The first historically verifiable Sinhala references to Nātha Dēviyō are found in inscriptions attributed to kings and courtiers of Gampola in what is now part of the up-country Kandyan cultural area. These inscriptions indicate Avalokiteśvara/Nātha's ascent in importance among the political officials of that time. In order to understand the religiohistorical significance of these inscriptional references and Nātha's later fame during the time of Parākramabāhu VI and the later Kandyan period, it is necessary to consider the context of the social and political history of the Gampola period and its attendant religious expressions.

Virtually all of the dominant political personalities of the unsettled Gampola suzerainty maintained close familial ties to south India. In part, this sociopolitical fact helps to explain the assimilative character of the emergent religion, art, and architecture that was patronized by the Gampola court. Yet matrimonial alliances with south Indian powers had been a strategic royal practice during the eleventh- through thirteenth-century Polonnaruva era as well and had not resulted in the veneration of Hindu deities and a Mahāyāna bodhisattva alongside the Buddha within the same halls of religious worship, a conspicuous development unique to the construction of religious complexes

during the early Gampola period. Thus, while it is clear that close relations between Hindu south Indian rulers and important Sinhalese Buddhist political families vying for power in the Gampola era obtained, and that these relations were partially responsible for the emergence of the religious assimilations with which we are concerned, it is also the case that other determinitive factors were involved. Specifically, conceptions of kingship in contemporary insular and mainland Southeast Asia seem to have made a decisive impact upon the formation of a more pluralistic religious culture in the increasingly ethnically variegated society of medieval Sri Lanka in the fourteenth century. Avalokiteśvara/Nātha's accommodation was a consequence.

The conditions surrounding the origins of the Gampola dynasty are not known to history with any degree of certainty. The *Cūlavaṃsa* economically states that following the reign of Vijayabāhu V (1335–1341) at Kurunegala, the Sinhala throne under Bhuvanekabāhu IV was established at Gangasiripura (modern Gampola) [Geiger, 1953: vol. 2, 210]. In attempting to reconstruct the historically obscure origins of the Gampola reign, Paranavitana and Nicholas [1961: 291–304] advanced the following scenario: a Hindu *āryacakravarti* in the service of the Tamil Pāṇḍyans in south India was forced to flee the Muslim sultanate established in Madurai in 1334. In an apparent alliance with a *Jāvaka* family then in political control of the north of Sri Lanka, the *āryacakravarti* agreed to settle for hegemony over the Jaffna peninsula in exchange for supporting the *Jāvaka* family (into which he may have also married) of Vijayabāhu V, who, in turn, established themselves in the south at Kurunegala, succeeding the Sinhala king Parākramabāhu IV (1303–1330); this *Jāvaka* family, following the demise of Vijayabāhu V, continued to share power through two brothers, Parākramabāhu V of Dedigama and Bhuvanekabāhu IV (the first of the Gampola kings) at the split capitals of Dedigama and Gampola. But shortly after the brothers came to power, they were dominated by the rising and powerful Alakeśvara family, who intermarried with them and assumed almost total control until Parākramabāhu VI was established on the throne at Kotte by a Chinese admiral in 1415.

Paranavitana and Nicholas have argued that this *Jāvaka* family actually descended from two foreign invaders of Southeast Asian origins: Māgha and Candrabhānu.[1] Lineage, however, is not the primary issue here. What is important is the extent to which these foreigners may have subsequently influenced Sinhala conceptions of kingship.

In Sinhala memory, Māgha suffers a rather nefarious reputation as a ransacking heretic who plundered Polonnaruva in the thirteenth century and consecrated himself as king. Known as "Kalinga Vijayabāhu," who ruled for 21 years with the might of 24,000 Malala(yi) soldiers, in the *Cūlavaṃsa* few

words are spared in vilifying his person and reign. While the *Nikāya-saṃgrahāva* and *Saddharmaratnākaraya* contain nothing of this descriptive sort of animosity, and other evidence suggests that Theravāda and Sinhala fortunes in the northern and eastern parts of the island were already in a state of decline before Māgha's invasion [Paranavitana and Nicholas, 1961: 244–46], the *Cūlavaṃsa* reports that Māgha confiscated all private property, tortured the common people, destroyed Buddhist libraries and monasteries, while forcibly converting the populace to an alien religion [Geiger, 1953: vol. 2, 132–34]. Geiger [133, n. 4] suggests that this alien religion was Hinduism, but the *Cūlavaṃsa* also states that Māgha's reign "brought great confusion to the four sharply divided castes" [133], a description, it would seem, that does not recommend Māgha as a *dharma*-minded Hindu king.

Māgha, according to traditional accounts, seems to have been preoccupied with securing the eastern coast of the island. He held the capital at Polonnaruva for 40 years before he was finally driven away to the north in about 1255 by the Sinhala king, Parākramabāhu II, who had simultaneously ruled from Dambadeniya with the apparent support of the south Indian Pāṇḍyans. With his defeat, Māgha fled to the northern part of the island, where he was able to maintain control of the Jaffna peninsula with the assistance of Chola power from Thanjavur.

In a long and controversial article, Paranavitana [1960b] marshaled a web of circumstantial evidence to argue that not only were Māgha and his soldiers of Malaysian Southeast Asian origins but that the entire line of Kalinga kings, including one by the name of Lokeśvara, originally came from Tāmralinga in Malaysia, a suggestion that, in turn, has been roundly criticized by Sirisena [1978: 45] and many others as inventive. Indeed, it is likely that Māgha was no *Jāvaka* and probably invaded Lanka from south India.

The term *Jāvaka,* which suggests Southeast Asian origins, is used for the first time in the *Cūlavaṃsa* in connection with its description of the subsequent invader Candrabhānu and his warriors [Geiger, 1953, vol. 2: 151]. He and his troops, who reportedly invaded Lanka during the 11th year of Parākramabāhu II's reign, are not only referred to as *Jāvaka*s, but more significantly, both the *Cūlavaṃsa* and the *Pūjāvaliya* refer explicitly to Candrabhānu and his warriors as Buddhists. The *Cūlavaṃsa* says disparagingly that Candrabhānu's claim to Buddhism was a pretext [151], likely another way of stating that he was not Theravādin. It also seems clear that Candrabhānu was aware of the traditional Sinhala political significance attached to the Buddha's hallowed tooth relic and alms bowl relic, possession of which, as palladia of the Sinhala people, conferred the legitimacy of kingship. Upon his invasion, Candrabhānu openly coveted these relics and is said to have demanded them of Parākramabāhu II.

Before his daring bid to conquer Lanka, Candrabhānu was under considerable military pressure of his own in Tāmralinga (in modern Malaysia) from emergent Thai power to his north. He is thought to have first invaded Sri Lanka from the south, perhaps near modern Hambantota, where he may have hoped to surprise Parākramabāhu II, who at the time was preoccupied with besieging the remnants of Māgha's power to the north in Jaffna [Paranavitana and Nicholas, 282]. This strategy seems to have failed, but Candrabhānu is again mentioned in the *Cūlavaṃsa* [Geiger, vol. 2: 187] and in south Indian inscriptions [Sirisena, 44] as later laying siege to Prince Vīrabāhu (Parākramabāhu II's successor) with a *Jāvaka* army and many Tamil soldiers at Yapahuva near Kurunegala many years later. His second onslaught came from the north after he had apparently repaired for a considerable amount of time under the protection of the Chola-supported Māgha or perhaps Māgha's son. Candrabhānu lost his life in the attack on Yapahuva. The *Jāvaka* military threat to Sinhala power in this context was minimal thereafter.

There are a number of reasons why Candrabhānu's invasion can be considered as the occasion when Southeast Asian conceptions of kingship were introduced to Lanka. As a Buddhist king from Tāmralinga, Candrabhānu was a likely inheritor of the Buddharāja cult wherein the king was regarded as a this-worldly manifestation of Lokeśvara (Avalokiteśvara). This bodhisattva/god/king cult had previously dominated conceptions of royal power in the old Śrī Vijaya kingdom of which Candrabhānu's Tāmralinga had once been a part. In addition, it had gained fruition in neighboring Southeast Asian Buddhist kingdoms to the north as well [Coedes, 1968: 81–168]. In a recently published exhaustive study of Avalokiteśvara's iconography in Southeast Asia, Nandana Chutiwongs [1984: 95–423 *passim*] has documented in great detail the massive extent to which Avalokiteśvara's cult dominated the cultural and political expressions of royal power in Burma, Thailand, and especially Cambodia during this very era.

Candrabhānu's demand for relics from Parākramabāhu II probably signified his awareness of a different legitimation scenario in Theravāda-influenced conceptions of kingship in the Sinhala context. It is interesting to note, however, that the first reference to Nātha in Pāli literature occurs in the *Cūlavaṃsa*'s description of Candrabhānu's nemesis, Parākramabāhu II. While it is tempting to see Candrabhānu's invasion as the obvious moment of Avalokiteśvara's political introduction to Sri Lanka, the *Cūlavaṃsa*'s account of Parākramabāhu II's religious activities indicates that the grounds for Avalokiteśvara's assimilation already may have been liberally prepared.

Upon his consecration, Parākramabāhu II took the name of *Kalikāla-sāhicca-sabbaññupaṇḍita* ("the scholar who is entirely familiar with the literature of the Kali age"). Essentially, this means that the king made a claim for

scholarly knowledge of the arts (primarily poetry, drama, and epic literature), forms of knowledge that were generally deemed by the Theravāda *sangha* as being a kind of lower, worldly preoccupation. Further, the reference in his title to the Kali age may reflect considerable Hindu influence on his worldview in general, following, as it does, the *Cūlavaṃsa*'s reference to the "confusion among the four castes" associated with Māgha's reign at Polonnaruva. Thus, it would seem that even before the threat of Candrabhānu, the Sinhala throne was occupied by an incumbent with comparatively liberal (by Theravāda standards) religious views, views that in all probability reflected the historical social presence of growing numbers of Hindus living among Sinhalese Buddhists.

The orthodox-minded *Cūlavaṃsa,* however, records that Parākramabāhu II was zealous in his worship of the tooth relic, beseeching its miraculous powers for the benefit of the people; that he undertook pilgrimages to the "sixteen holy places"; that he invited *bhikkhu*s from the Chola country to establish "harmony between the two orders"; that he built the city of Sirivaddhana, including a magnificent *vihāra* decorated with brilliant paintings and images of the gods; and that when he addressed his subjects at the conclusion of a 7-day festival in honor of the "three sacred objects," his words were like "the fruit on the wishing-creeper of the paramitas of the omniscient (Buddha)" [Geiger, 1953, vol. 2: 159–70]. His litany of religious works recorded in the *Čulavaṃsa* continues on to include his rebuilding of Devinuwara on the southern coast and thus the reestablishment of the shrine of the god Upulvan (later identified as Viṣṇu in Sinhala culture), his inauguration of the Āsāḷhī festival in honor of Upulvan, his pious veneration of the god Saman, and finally, during a time of drought, the holding of a huge festival in honor of the relics, the bodhi trees, and the "great protectors" Maitreya and Nātha (the first Pāli literary reference to Nātha).[2] If the *Cūlavaṃsa* account is followed, then Nātha was patronized by Sinhala royalty initially during the time of Candrabhānu's attempt to wrest the legitimating symbols of the tooth relic and alms bowl relic from Parākramabāhu II.

From the *Cūlavaṃsa* account, it is clear that Parākramabāhu II not only fulfilled his *rājadhamma* to support the Buddhist *sangha,* but that he engaged in many diverse sorts of religious activities that cut across traditional sectarian lines. He is repeatedly referred to by the *Cūlavaṃsa* as ruling according to the precepts of Manu, indicating, ideologically at least, a *brahman*ical orientation to his kingship. In addition, his claim to knowledge of the "lower" *brahman*ical works of literature and his lavish patronage of the gods suggest a religious worldview in which all the elements of an emerging and complex culture were officially recognized and supported. In many ways, his thirteenth-century religious policies anticipate those of Parākramabāhu VI in the

fifteenth century and as such may have constituted the prototypical form of syncretic religion characterizing today's up-country traditional Sinhalese. It is not unreasonable to assume that he was the first Sinhala king to venerate Avalokiteśvara, especially because such an act would represent a parallel response to Candrabhānu's demand for the relics.

There are further reasons to believe that Candrabhānu and his *Jāvaka* warriors were sympathetic adherents to the Mahāyāna and Tantrayāna Buddhist traditions and made a lasting impression on their enemies. In the first instance, Prince Vīrabāhu, who defeated Candrabhānu at Yapahuva, immediately took the epithet of *Bosat* and proceeded to be coronated at Anuradhapura. While many kings in the previous history of Sinhala Sri Lanka had referred to themselves as bodhisattvas, this instance has particular significance. By taking such an epithet in this context, Prince Vīrabāhu was sending an unmistakable message to his now-conquered *Jāvaka* enemies in a language they would surely understand, given their own defeated leader's Buddhist background and likely bodhisattva aspirations. That is, he now claimed full title to bodhisattva kingship of the island, a title that Candrabhānu had coveted for himself. Second, the *Kōkila-sandēśaya* ("The Message of the Lark"), written during the reign of Parākramabāhu VI, refers to a magnificent Nātha *dēvālaya* in Jāvaka Kotte (Jaffna) [Gunawardhana, 1925: verse 239], thus lending further circumstantial support to the fact that the *Jāvaka*s venerated Avalokiteśvara, for such a magnificent *dēvālaya* could not have been constructed or maintained without the support of the leading ruling families of the region. That a Nātha *dēvālaya* existed in *Jāvaka* Kotte on the northern peninsula of Sri Lanka in the fifteenth century would also indicate that by this time Avalokiteśvara as Lokeśvara Nātha had been wholly identified with the deity Nātha. The *dēvālaya*'s existence during the time of Parākramabāhu VI therefore suggests a continuation of the cult from *Jāvaka* origins, presumably established during the time of Candrabhānu's presence.[3]

While we have seen that there is solid inscriptional evidence for the presence of *Tantr*ic communities in Sri Lanka during the seventh through the tenth centuries, there is no conclusive evidence that suggests any political powers on the island were consistently sympathetic to this Buddhist orientation or that Avalokiteśvara became a subject of royal veneration. Correspondingly in this earlier period, the ascetic *lōkōttara* (soteriological) dimension of Avalokiteśvara was normatively expressed in his iconography, while his royal *laukika* ("this-worldly") orientation as a protective deity seems to have been largely ignored. But it was precisely the elements of the royal cult of Avalokiteśvara that eventually found their way into the court religion of the Gampola kings, and it was during and following the Gampola era that Avalokiteśvara's iconography became increasingly royal in orientation. From our

discussion, it therefore seems reasonable to conclude that the impetus for Nātha's royal associations came to Gampola through the *Jāvaka* family that had established itself first at Kurunegala in the 1330s, before Sinhala kingship was shared by Bhuvanekabāhu IV at Gampola and Parākramabāhu V at Dedigama.

The Rise of Nātha in Gampola Culture

With the succession of the dynasty in Kuṛunegala by the Gampola throne in A.D. 1341, the emergence of Nātha as a national deity of specifically Sinhala political fortunes finally begins to take place. The Gampola period in general signals the ascendance of national deities into the religion of the Sinhala court. While the *Čulavaṃsa* describes the eclectic religious activities of Parākramabāhu II of Dambadeniya at great length and then neglects any details germane to the Gampola rulers, the evidence of religious assimilation in the Gampola era is actually eminently more profuse and takes on a variety of forms of expression.

To begin, Sena Lankādhikāra, whose name indicates that he attained the post of prime minister during the reign of the first Gampola king, Bhuvanekabāhu IV, is credited with having built an image house in honor of Upulvan at Devinuwara. While Parākramabāhu II was also credited with this activity, the Mahāyāna-oriented motivation cited in the following passage is lacking in his instance. Referring to Sena Lankādhikāra's action, the *Tisara-sandēśaya* ("The Message of the Swan") [Jayatilaka, 1935] states:

> This beautiful Akbo-vehera contains a sacred Bo Tree. Sena Lankādhikāra, who employs the fourfold devices for the protection of Lanka, who observes the ten pāramitās and hopes for a state of Buddhahood, caused to be constructed as he wished an image house conforming to the measurements of the buildings as of old [verse 48].

What the passage from the *Tisara-sandēśaya* indicates is not only official veneration for a national deity but also the clear presence of an ideology in which the rulers of the country were aspirers of the *bodhisattvayāna,* for example, the perfection of the 10 *pāramitās*. In other words, during the earliest phase of the Gampola era, the belief that the political power of the kingdom derived from an aspiring bodhisattva/god/king is clearly in evidence. This is further substantiated by analyses of inscriptions, temple architecture, and ritual expressions deriving from precisely this period of time.

In detailed discussions of religious life at the Lankatilaka temple, built during the reign of the first Gampola king (Bhuvanekabāhu IV), Hans-Dieter

Evers [1972: 66] concludes that "the idea of the godking reached its height . . . after the Polonnaruva era at about the time Lankatilaka Temple was built." Noting that the daily and weekly rites of *tēvāra* and *nānumura* eventually became the nucleus of ritual life in the *Daḷadā Māligāva* ("Temple of the Tooth") of the later Kandyan period, Evers goes on to say that the ritual proceedings of Lankatilaka

> emphasizes the ideological connections, if not the identity, between kingship, Buddhahood and divine status, which is so typical of the Southeast Asian empires of Khmer, Champa, Śrī Vijaya, Majapahit and Pagan [66].

He further suggests

> that under the influence of Southeast Asian ideas of divine Buddhist kingship the three parts of the system—cult of the Buddha, of the gods and of the king—merged more and more during the 13th–14th century in Ceylon. The temples which used to be separate were now combined in one building, the rituals became identical, though the Buddha himself retained his "Theravāda identity" and the Bodhisattvas were incorporated into the ranks of the gods as Nātha and probably as Saman [67].

These developments are genuinely reflected in the spatial architecture of both Lankatilaka and Gadaladeniya temples, built by the prime minister Sena Lankādhikāra during the reign of Bhuvanekabāhu IV. That is, the religious eclecticism reflected in the earlier reign of Parākramabāhu II, further diversified by the presence of "Malaysian" *Jāvaka* invaders, was to a certain extent formally institutionalized and concretely expressed in the construction of religious buildings during the Gampola era. At Lankatilaka, a Buddha image hall is surrounded on three sides by a *dēvālaya* containing images of the gods Skanda (Kataragama Dēviyō), Vibhīṣana, Viṣṇu (Upulvan), Saman, Gaṇa (Gaṇeṣa), and Kaḷukumāra ("the Black Prince," a *baṇḍāra*-class deity invoked for sorcery). At Gadaladeniya, a *dāgāba* (symbolizing the presence of the Buddha) on the temple grounds is surrounded at the four cardinal directions by small shrines that formerly housed images of the then-recognized four national deities (Skanda, Vibhīṣana, Viṣṇu, and Saman).[4] Inside the main image house at Gadaladeniya and behind and above the south Indian, almost Jain-styled Buddha image seated underneath a *makara toraṇa* deities of Hindu origin (Brahmā, Śakra, Suyāma, Santuṣita) and Buddhist bodhisattvas (Nātha and Maitri) are conspicuously represented. What these artistic constructions indicate is the close proximity and relationship that seem to have obtained between the Buddha and the gods in the emergent religious conceptions of the early Gampola court. That the Buddha is surrounded by deities of *brahman*ical and Mahāyāna origins reflects the social fact that a Buddhist king included Hindus (and Mahāyānists?) among his variegated subjects. This

social fact is confirmed by Mudiyanse [1965: 114, 136], who notes in his discussion of the Gadaladeniya and later Niyamgampaya and Alavala Amuna rock inscriptions that caste was so conspicuous at this time that society in general may have been formally regulated by its prescriptions. In addition, it is clear from these same inscriptions that Brahmins and Chetties held important positions of power in the court [128]. With regard to Lankatilaka, Mudiyanse also points out that "the sculptor Rayar is cited as the head of the master masons. This name suggests that south Indian architects and sculptors were employed for the building purpose." Furthermore, "the Sinhalese and Tamil army has been addressed to safeguard the interests of the vihāra" [116]. Thus, the formal inclusion of Hindu deities in an artistic representation of the divine pantheon graphically illustrates the social reality and formal acceptance of religioethnic integration.

At this time, that is, in the 1340s, we also find the first inscriptional references to Nātha. In both the Lankatilaka and Gadaladeniya inscriptions dating to the reign of Bhuvanekabāhu IV, Nātha is mentioned, along with Maitri, in such a way as to indicate their distinctive status as bodhisattvas vis-à-vis the Hindu *deva*s who are also mentioned. They occupy an interstitial rank between the Buddha and the gods of Hindu or indigenous origins. In the Lankatilaka copperplate inscription, as well as in the Lankatilaka rock inscription [*Epigraphia Zeylanica,* vol. 4: 106–7], Nātha is specifically referred to as Lokeśvara Nātha, thus positively linking his identity to bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara [Paranavitana, 1960a: 7]. In discussing the epithet Lokeśvara Nātha utilized in this inscription, Paranavitana [1928] notes that

> the word Nātha means "Lord" and is only a shortened form of the fuller epithet 'Lokeśvara Nātha'. . . . It is hardly necessary to mention that the epithet Lokeśvara is one of the most familiar of the many names of Avalokiteśvara and was the one by which he was best known in Cambodia and Java [53].

These inscriptions, however, are simply references without any telling descriptions or attributions to the figures in question. Nātha's emerging importance within the pantheon and his specific relationship to Sinhala kingship do not emerge concretely in available empirical evidence until the time of the Sagama rock inscription some 35 to 40 years later.

In the intervening years, the fortunes of the Gampola dynasty apparently changed dramatically, with Sena Lankādhikāra receding into the background. It has been noted previously that after Vijayabāhu V of Kurunegala had reigned, Bhuvanekabāhu IV of Gampola shared power with his brother Parākramabāhu V of Dedigama. However, the low-country Kelaniya inscription of 1344 mentions neither Bhuvanekabāhu IV nor Parākramabāhu V, thus testifying to their tendentious hold on the Sinhala throne, or the limited authoritative

jurisdiction of their power. Instead, the inscription mentions Alagakkōnāra (Alakeśvara) as a potentate, the apparent 10th successor to a certain Niśśaṃka Alagakkōnāra who originally came from Vanchi (south India), a reference that seems to indicate that this particular family had exercised nominal political control over at least the western and southwestern regions of Lanka at this time.

Further, the Muslim itinerant Ibn Batūta reported in 1344 that during his pilgrimage to Śrī Pāda (Adam's Peak), which had been arranged by the Āryacakravarti of Jaffna, he had passed through the town of Konakar (possibly modern Ratnapura), where he observed that Alakeśvara (Alagakkōnāra) possessed the white elephant [Paranavitana and Nicholas, 296], a symbol of royal power. The Alakeśvaras (Alagakkōnāras) had become a great merchant family, with their family seat at Rayigama (east of modern Kalutara). Their power was such that they could afford to owe no allegiance to Bhuvanekabāhu IV and his brother Parākramabāhu V. In fact, the Alakeśvaras became rival claimants, with designs on usurping the legitimate Sinhala throne. Eventually, they colluded with the Jaffna Āryacakravarti to drive Parākramabāhu V out of Dedigama to the extreme southeastern portion of the island; an inscription found at the Magul Mahāvihāra (near modern-day Lahugala) refers to Parākramabāhu V as residing there after a battle with the Āryacakravarti.

Vikramabāhu III (apparently a nephew of the brothers Parākramabāhu V and Bhuvanekabāhu IV and the son of their sister, who had married Sena Lankādhikāra) assumed the throne at Gampola in 1351 but within a few years had become the puppet of a dictatorial Alakeśvara, who had established himself in nearby Peradeniya. The Alakeśvaras' collusion with the Āryacakravarti had led to an agreement whereby taxes and tribute would be owed to the Jaffna ruler in exchange for de facto Alakeśvara hegemony over the Sinhala kings in the south [Paranavitana and Nicholas, 296–99]. Such an agreement does not seem to have lasted happily for very long, for in 1369 the Alakeśvaras' forces defeated the Āryacakravarti's on the coast near modern Colombo. In the same year, an Alakeśvara is credited in a *katikāvata* with purifying the *sangha,* thus indicating a consolidation of his power and his recognition by a newly constituted *sangha.* More significantly, a few years later, the Alakeśvaras' army is known to have defeated the forces of the Āryacakravarti near modern Matale, driving away the Āryacakravarti's *brahmin* tax collectors in the process. Following this last battle, which appears to have been quite decisive, the Sagama rock inscription of 1380 contains the first attestation of what was to become Nātha's intimate relationship to Sinhala up-country rule. By this time, Bhuvanekabāhu V had succeeded Vikramabāhu III at Gampola, but in actuality the Alakeśvara family remained in firm control. The inscription [*Epigraphia Zeylanica*] reads:

> Prosperity! In the ninth year of the pre-eminent Śrī Bhuvanekabāhu in whom Fame abode just as Fortune was well attached [to him], who is the ornament of the solar dynasty, the Supreme Lord of the three Siṃhalas and the possessor of the nine gems.
>
> The two brothers Alakeśvara and Devamantrīśvara, being mines for the gems which are virtues, are [comparable to] the Ocean; being the bearers of extolled power or spears are [comparable to] the six-faced [God Skanda]; [they] have their faces averted from women [belonging to] others; [their] mother's lineage is the Ganavasi family which arrived [in this island] bringing the Sacred Bodhi [tree]; their father's lineage is the Mehenavara family and [they] are radiant with a glory which fully illuminated these two [families as well as the whole] world just as the Sun and the Moon [illuminate the mountains] Yugandhara and Surindhara. In the endeavor which is being made by these two brothers for the benefit of the State and the Church in *Lakdiva, Lord Nātha of Senkadagala and the god of the Nā tree came to their assistance, appeared to them in a dream and pointed out the means of victory causing the hostile party [to decline] like the moon in the second half of the lunar month and the friendly party [to flourish] like the moon in the first half of the lunar month; thus with divine favour [they] made Lamka [subject to the authority of] one umbrella and caused everything to prosper* [vol. 4: 310–11; emphases mine].

The Sagama rock inscription is important to this study on a number of levels. First, the lineages of the two brothers mentioned in the inscription point to the unification of the rival families of Alakeśvara and Sena Lankādhikāra during the Gampola era. Their claim to legitimation is therefore initially made by noting that the most powerful families of the time, the scions of the ancient Sinhala royal lineage, have been united. What is further being stressed, beyond their pure Sinhala lineage, is the unity they have forged among the people. But even more fundamentally, the inscription links the political fortunes of the Sinhala throne to Nātha for the first time in Sinhala history. Here, Nātha is envisioned as a great protector of the Sinhala kingdom who appears intimately to its leaders, giving them decisive direction leading to victory and prosperity.[5] While there is no claim to kingship made by the two brothers, it is clear that they are the de facto leaders of the nation by virtue of their claim to work for the welfare of the state and *sangha*. This same Alakeśvara, in fact, is the Alakeśvara who inspired the earlier *katikāvata* in 1369 to purify the *sangha*. Commenting wryly on Alakeśvara's mention in the Sagama rock inscription, Paranavitana [1928] says:

> This Alakeśvara was the dominant figure in Ceylon politics towards the end of the fourteenth century; and according to contemporary writings he is credited with expelling monks of reprehensible character and of heretical leanings [the *katikāvata* of 1369]. It is significant that the champion of orthodoxy at that period was particularly devoted to the worship of Avalokiteśvara, a Mahā-

> yānistic deity. Evidently, orthodoxy at that time did not hesitate to recognize Bodhisattvas of heretical origins. The standard of the times must have differed widely from that of Anuradhapura days. Perhaps the very fact that Nātha was of Vaitulya origin was then forgotten [57].

Thus, by 1380, the identification of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara with the Sinhala guardian deity Nātha had been rendered by the state.

There are two other inscriptions of note referring to Nātha during the years of Gampola rule. The first dates back to 1360, during the reign of Vikramabāhu III. It refers to a royal donation made to the "god of Senkadagala" (Kandy), inferring that a temple already existed at that time as the seat of the deity [*Epigraphia Zeylanica,* vol. 4: 271–73]. When this inscription from nearby Ampitiye is read in conjunction with the Sagama rock inscription, it would appear that the "god of Senkadagala" is none other than Lokeśvara Nātha. If Nātha was the territorial deity of what later became the royal area of Kandy town proper (Senkadagala) in the fourteenth century, his rise in status to a national deity after Sinhala kingship was finally established in Kandy at the end of the sixteenth century is therefore no mysterious event, and his recognition by the political powers of Gampola can be understood as a harbinger of this later status, a matter of logical religiopolitical expediency.

The early history of Nātha in the up-country region may now be advanced. Prior to the fourteenth century, possibly as early as the eighth century, the Mahāyāna-*tantr*ic cult of Avalokiteśvara was introduced into the up-country region of what is now the modern Kandy area. The nearby Nalanda temple to the north of Matale testifies to the presence of *tantr*ism and the veneration of Avalokiteśvara in the region from this period. Other Avalokiteśvara images dated to this earlier period proliferated in peripheral regions of the island as well as in Anuradhapura. Before the kingships of Kurunegala and Gampola, the Kandyan region was one such peripheral area. The magnificent Avalokiteśvara image still in the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya,* while recently dated by Mudiyanse [1985: 6–11] to be of fourteenth-century origins, is in fact of a much earlier time period. My own argument for a much earlier dating of this particularly important image has been based on considerations of style, especially when it is compared with the Veheragala Avalokiteśvara image from Mihintale and when considered in contrast to the variant styles and physical substances used to fashion the later Nātha images at Vegiriya and Pasgama in the fifteenth century. In any case, it is my contention that the Mahāyāna identity of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in the Kandyan up-country was eventually forgotten over the centuries as he became more and more identified as a *laukika*-oriented, boon-conferring, protective, and regional deity. Concomitantly, his name was shortened simply to Nātha, a general term of currency in south India meaning "protector" that aptly describes his active *laukika*

role to his devotees. In the fourteenth century, amid the institutionalizing process of syncretic religion during the Gampola period, he was incorporated into the religion of the court as the result of his local importance as a regional up-country deity as well as his newly recognized importance in the legitimation scenario of bodhisattva/god/king kingship. That is, the cult of Avalokiteśvara was revived in Sinhala circles during the fourteenth century due to the twin pressures of imported international Buddhist theories of royal legitimation on the one hand, which came by way of Candrabhānu's unsuccessful invasions, and by virtue of the fact that the Sinhala cult of Avalokiteśvara had devolved into the local cult of Nātha in the Kandyan region. Both currents converged during the latter part of the fourteenth century to form the bases of the Nātha cult.

Most scholars are of the opinion that the Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy dates to the fourteenth century and, as such, is the oldest surviving building in the city. The Ampitiye inscription may indeed indicate its presence at this time, since the royal donation referred to was made, presumably, to sustain the ritual life of a temple to this god. The architecture of the Nātha *dēvālaya* is unique and constitutes yet another example of the assimilative nature of institutionalized religion at this time. Its structural outline resembles the typical structure of all *dēvālaya*s in Sri Lanka in that a drumming hall is situated in front of the *diggē* (the forechamber in which devotees present their petitions to the *kapurāla*), which in turn abuts the sanctum sanctorum. The sanctum sanctorum, however, is uniquely crowned with a two-storied *śikharaya* that takes the shape of a *stūpa*. This is the room that continues to house the magnificent bronze image of Avalokiteśvara.

The Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya*, then, consists of a religious building, the general character of which usually houses a god of Hindu or indigenous Sinhala origins. But in this instance, a Mahāyāna bodhisattva has been installed within a room that is crowned by the symbol of Theravāda tradition par excellence: the *stūpa*. Thus, the image of Nātha and the building within which it is housed, together with the subsequent history of the Nātha cult in the Kandyan region, seem to almost perfectly express the intersections of the assimilative process taking place during the up-country medieval period.

The last relevant inscription dating from the Gampola era is found at what is now Vegiriya Nātha *dēvālaya*, some 7 miles northwest of Gampola. Although the date of the inscription is 1415, 7 years after the fall of the Gampola dynasty and the year in which Parākramabāhu VI was installed by the Chinese at Kotte, it records the donations of Bhuvanekabāhu V (1372–1408), Vikramabāhu III (1357–1374), and Parākramabāhu-āpā (the grandson of Sena Lankādhikāra) for the sustenance of Lokeśvara Nātha at Vegiriya [Codrington, 1933: 294–95], thereby indicating the continued patronage of

this *dēvālaya* throughout the reign of the Gampola era. The local "*sthalapurāṇa*" (a locally well-known oral myth of origins) of the Vegiriya *dēvālaya* relates how Bhuvanekabāhu IV discovered the sculpted images of Nātha (Avalokiteśvara) and Biso Baṇḍāra (Tārā) in a cave and proceeded to build this very *dēvālaya*, the building that remains on that site today as reservoir of sacred power to be tapped by villagers in the surrounding area.[6]

Nātha Dēviyō in Early *Sandēśaya* Literature of the Gampola Period

The patterns of religious and cultural assimilation expressed in the classical literature of Parākramabāhu VI's fifteenth-century Kotte reign, especially in the writings of Śrī Rāhula, were anticipated during the Gampola period and even before that, to a lesser degree, during the reign of Parākramabāhu II. We have noted how the assimilative religious worldview of the Gampola rulers was so clearly articulated in the spatial constructions and divine figures represented in the Lankatilaka and Gadaladeniya temples, and in the architectural symbolism of the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya* as well. But the best literary evidence for this assimilative religion comes in the form of the *Tisara Sandēśaya,* a poem that introduced a new genre of literature into Sinhala culture that was to become extremely popular during Parākramābahu VI's fifteenth-century reign. It was in the context of *sandēśaya* literature[7] that Nātha was extolled as a great savior deity and thus secured his place not only within the classical traditions of Sinhala writing but as a deity of great national importance.

In the Sinhala *sandēśaya*s, exotic birds carry important messages from devotees to the shrines of the gods, where a favor of divine assistance is implored. While the bird makes its way through the air on its vicarious pilgrimage to the sacred place of divinity, the poet seizes the opportunity to describe the geographical and topographical aviary route taken in great detail. Among many things, *sandēśaya* literature provides instruction in the geography, flora, and fauna of medieval Sri Lanka. But more fundamental than the expressions of loving affinity for nature are mundane requests of a *laukika* type that are conveyed by the bird to an important personage charged with the responsibility of presenting the plea to the deity. In the *sandēśaya*s of the Kotte period, these requests are specifically concerned with the well-being of Parākramabāhu VI and his family. *Sandēśaya* literature is thus decidedly *laukika* in outlook but it also contains a *lōkōttara* concern: many descriptions of religious places, praises of virtuous monks, and solicitations to guardian deities to perpetuate the well-being of the *sangha*. Indeed, while it is not

followed by any classical Sinhala literature of great significance until the eighteenth century, this genre represents a conspicuous break from past conceptions of what literature had to be; in these poems, the gods are asked to perform tasks on behalf of royalty that are also decidedly nonreligious, at least non-*lōkōttara,* in orientation.

The *Tisara-sandēśaya* and the *Mayūra-sandēśaya* ("The Message of the Peacock") are the two earliest texts of this genre, having been produced during the Gampola era. The *Tisara* is especially significant to our study. Within this text, we find the only literary reference to Tārā, the queen/consort of Avalokiteśvara in *tantr*ic tradition, and the earliest description of Nātha in Sinhala literary tradition. In the flowery language of the *sandēśayas*, verses 126 and 127 of the *Tisara* [Jayatilaka, 1935] read as follows:

> His beautiful head with matted hair is like unto a rain cloud with lightning attached to it. The eyelashes surpass the beauty of the blue lily and the sapphire. What are the two hands like the trunks of white elephants comparable to? They exhibit the splendour of a pair of streams flowing down the side of a white mountain. The charming rosary hanging down his nectar-like body assumes the splendor of a line of blue geese—if there exist such—in the celestial river. With his feet and shining nails, the brilliance of an evening cloud with stars strewn were shown; and the pride of a dew-strewn lotus contracting by the rays of the moon was set aside. Lord Nātha, distinguished with such marks of beauty, abides resplendent in that Buddha-shrine. Bow down gladly to him, and pray him to fulfill thy heart's desire. Depart thou hence, without tarrying, after worshipping the Queen Tārā, who has adorned the magnificent mansion of Sri Lanka, with the multi-colored canopy of her fame; who has eschewed vice and is adorned with virtue as if with jewels; and who unfailingly bestows, like the Divine Cow, whatever is desired of riches.

The Buddha shrine referred to in this *Tisara* passage was located at the Doravaka Nātha *Dēvālaya* (which is no longer in existence but at that time was situated just southwest of modern Kegalle). Local tradition ascribes its origins to Bhuvanekabāhu VI (Prince Sapumal), in the latter part of the fifteenth century, but its description here within the fourteenth-century *Tisara* indicates a prior existence. The fact that an image of both Tārā and Nātha are described at the Doravaka *dēvālaya* may mean that this shrine reflected the same religious conceptions that were present when the Nātha *dēvālayas* in Vegiriya and Pasgama were constructed, for, within both of those *dēvālayas*, which date to the same general period, images of female deity accompany Nātha, as was also the case at Totagamuva on the southwest coast before that *dēvālaya* met an unhappy fate at the hands of the Portuguese [Ilangasinha, 1972: 325]; the description of the Nātha sculpture corresponds closely to the Nātha image at Vegiriya.

Mudiyanse [1967: 45] has compared the *Tisara* passage describing Nātha with the image of Nātha at the Vegiriya *dēvālaya* and argues that "the deity was in most respects in agreement with the one at Wegiriya." If this is so, then the physical remnants of the *tantr*ic cult of Avalokiteśvara and Tārā survive today in the sculptural representations of the Sinhala deities venerated at the Vegiriya and Pasgama Nātha *Dēvālaya*s.

Be that as it may, it is also clear from the *Tisara* passages that in the fourteenth-century Gampola period Avalokiteśvara and Tārā had already been transformed functionally into Sinhala deities. They are depicted in the typical fashion of Sinhala gods granting this-worldly boons to their devoted faithful. There is little hint of their bodhisattva efficacy of rescuing the suffering from woes of *saṃsār*ic existence, despite the fact that Nātha retained the epithet "Lokeśvara." Instead, both deities appear as powers fully operative in this world (*laukika*), ready to assist in the attainment of whatever their devotees' hearts may desire. This appears to be especially true of Tārā, who is compared to a nurturant "Divine Cow," clearly evoking the image of a chaste mother figure. The descriptions of both figures thus reflect a thorough domestication. What has survived, however, in relation to Nātha, is the consistent association with brightness and light.

Analytical Summary of Nātha's Assimilation into Sinhala Buddhism in the Medieval Gampola Era

For many centuries antecedent to the Gampola era, the Mahāyāna cult of Avalokiteśvara in Sri Lanka had devolved into veneration of a locally important regional deity. But during the late thirteenth century, the religiopolitical cult of Lokeśvara Nātha, a cult dominating conceptions of Buddhist kingship in contemporary Southeast Asian nation-states, was introduced to Sri Lanka through the invader Candrabhānu. Vestiges of the original Avalokiteśvara Mahāyāna tradition in the Kandyan area were combined with the newly imported religiopolitical cult of Lokeśvara Nātha to produce the surviving expressions of Gampola material culture that we have examined here.

In the Sagama rock inscription, we noted that Nātha was credited for an intervention that led to victory in battle, becoming, in effect, a very politically significant deity to the state. The political significance of Nātha was fully sustained in his later association with the family of Parākramabāhu VI, as attested by inscriptions and literature of the early Kotte period to be examined below. Nātha became a deity thoroughly associated with the continued sustenance of royal political power, a legacy that reached its apex during the later reign of the Kandyan kings beginning in the late sixteenth century.

While Nātha gained importance because of his perceived *laukika* powers that were readily exploited by political power brokers, his ultimate *lōkōttara* significance was never fully eclipsed. *Sandēśaya* literature of the Kotte era, especially works connected to the great monk/poet/grammarian Śrī Rāhula, reveal that his bodhisattva prowess of sustaining the true *dharma* and saving devotees from the travails of *saṃsāra* were still recognized by a few. Indeed, these soteriological facets of his profile, while not greatly emphasized in the later Kandyan period, were ultimately responsible for his continued survival in the postkingship era of Sinhala history, for, in modern Sri Lanka, Nātha is now identified as the future Buddha Maitri whose distant but expected advent continues to symbolize the final *lōkōttara* hope of *nibbāna* for many contemporary yet traditionally minded Sinhalese. Therefore, while the Mahāyāna cult of Avalokiteśvara was formally assimilated into a Theravāda-dominated Buddhist culture on the basis of perceived *laukika* power, its own religious legitimation and survival were the consequence of its eventual assimilation into the Theravāda hermeneutic per se: the religious path culminating in the experience of enlightenment and the realization of *nibbāna*.

Avalokiteśvara/Nātha: The Bodhisattva/God during the Reign of Parākramabāhu VI

During the early Kotte era of Parākramabāhu VI, the cult of Nātha seems to have become widespread throughout the southwestern low-country regions of Sinhala Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka as well. Nātha is prominent as a compassionate and benevolent bodhisattva and deity in several *sandēśaya* poems, especially those works connected to the eminent *gamavasi* monk Śrī Rāhula, whose works of poetry and scholarly erudition have become classics in Sinhala literary tradition. Under the patronage of Parākramabāhu VI, who may have been his stepfather,[8] Śrī Rāhula became the monastic chief of the *gamavasi* fraternity[9] and the principal of the renowned Toṭagamuva *pirivena* about 90 miles south of Kotte on the southwest coast. The seat of Nātha's cult is said to have been established here, and it is clear from his writings that Śrī Rāhula encouraged Nātha's active propitiation. This and other evidence suggest that Nātha was recognized as an important object of veneration by Parākramabāhu's royal court.

Parākramabāhu's ascent to the throne in 1415 was prefigured by a prolonged power struggle within the Alakeśvara family, which, by this time, had not only consolidated its power over up-country Gampola and the coastal southwestern regions of the island but in the process had established a heavily fortified military fortress at Kotte. Eventually, the defeated older brother in a

family feud, Vīra Alakeśvara, who had been banished to exile in India over a period of many years, returned to Sri Lanka upon the death of his younger brother and enemy, Vīrabāhu, who had defeated him years before. Vīra Alakeśvara quickly defeated the sons of his younger brother and assumed power for 12 years until 1411, when he was captured by a Chinese admiral, Cheng Ho, and kidnapped to the Ming court. From this point on, however, there is much confusion as to exactly what occurred. I quote at length from Paranavitana's and Nicholas's [1961] surmise:

> From Chinese sources, we learn that he [Parākramabāhu VI] was nominated by the Chinese emperor and was installed by Cheng Ho with the backing of his naval forces. The Chinese sources categorically state that Sey- or Yeh-pa-naena, elected by the Sinhalese at the Chinese court, was afterwards named Pu-la-ko-ma-Ba-zae-la-cha, i.e., Parākramabāhu-rāja, and that he personally visited the Chinese court bearing tribute in 1416 and 1421. No ruler of the name, other than Parākramabāhu VI, is known from any other source to have existed at this time. [But] the prince who was later known as Parākramabāhu VI could not have been one of the captives taken to China by Cheng Ho. For he could not have been present at the court of Vīra Alakeśvara whose family was hostile to that of Parākramabāhu. The probability therefore is that the prince, or others acting on his behalf, solicited and received the aid of Cheng Ho during his first expedition [to Sri Lanka some years earlier when he had encountered an unreceptive Vīra Alakeśvara], and that the Chinese admiral adopted a hostile attitude to Vīra Alakeśvara as he had already espoused the cause of this prince. With the Chinese naval forces to back him and the stunning effect of the capture of Vīra Alekśvara on the Sinhalese maritime regions, Parākrambāhu would have been acknowledged as the king [306–7; brackets mine].

There is much more to the story than this, such as the traditions relating how the youthful Parākramabāhu VI and his mother were sheltered from an Alakeśvara attack by the eminent monk Vīdāgama Maitrēya Thera in Rayigama, the Alakeśvara's old family town.

Shrouded in confusion as Parākramabāhu VI's rise to power seems to be, an exacting historical account of the early years of his reign may not ever be completely possible. Much of our knowledge about Parākramabāhu's early family life and subsequent rule is derived from surviving legends, the *Cūlavaṃsa,* and what can be inferred from poetic *sandēśaya* literature.

Parākramabāhu and members of his family figure very heavily in the ostensible motivation for a number of *sandēśaya* compositions. Indeed, in the earliest *sandēśaya* poem written during Parākramabāhu's reign, the *Haṃsa Sandēśaya* ("The Message of the Swan"), Vīdāgama Maitrēya Thera of Rayigama, its author and the royal familial preceptor (who may have been the first teacher of Śrī Rāhula), sends a message to another *thera,* Vanaratana of

Karagala, urging him to recite the *Ratana Sutta* 100,000 times and to invoke the blessings of the national deities in order to strengthen the power and wisdom of Parākramabāhu VI. Though this *sandēśaya,* written from one Theravāda *bhikkhu* to another, expresses an abiding belief in the efficacy of the gods, it is a work that is still regarded as containing "the views of the Vanavasi fraternity . . . to defend Theravāda from Mahāyāna and Hindu influence" [Ilangasinha, 35–36]. Since it must have been written to impress the court, it must also reflect the contemporary views of the court regarding its relation to divine power.

The *Parevi Sandēśaya* ("The Message of the Pigeon"), written subsequently by Śrī Rāhula early in his career, beseeches the god Upulvan (Viṣṇu) at Devinuvara to provide a suitable husband for Candravatī, daughter of Parākramabāhu, in order to result in the birth of a suitable heir to the king's throne. It also infers the interests of Sri Rahula's *gamavasi* monks in sustaining the current line of royal succession. Both *gamavasi* and *vanavasi* segments of the *sangha* sought royal support and favor. There seems to be every indication that they both succeeded.

The *Sälalihiṇi Sandēśaya* ("The Message of the Mynah"), also written by Śrī Rāhula, consists chiefly of a request to the god Vibhīṣana of Kelaniya to confer a worthy son on Ulakuḍaya-dēvī, another daughter of the king.

Finally, the *Girā Sandēśaya* ("The Message of the Parrot"), written by an unknown poet, contains a request to Śrī Rāhula at Totagamuwe to invoke the blessings of Nātha on Parākramabāhu VI and on the Buddhist tradition of Lanka in general. While the *Girā Sandēśaya* contains the clearest singular depiction of Nātha's role as a protector and provider for Sinhala kingship, in each of these classical poems veneration of the gods and belief in their efficacy is variously connected to the continued well-being of the royal family of Parākramabāhu VI at Kotte. In them, we find the construction of a sociocosmic order wherein the interests of the gods and royalty have become thoroughly entwined.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Śrī Rāhula and his students were aware of Nātha's bodhisattva soteriological importance as well. As the chief subject in the Girā who is petitioned to intervene with Nātha, Śrī Rāhula must have been known for his own veneration of the god. It is therefore not surprising that something of Avalokiteśvara's Mahāyāna identity and character as evinced from Mahāyāna literary sources would be reflected in these works. In the *Girā Sandēśaya* [Sugatapala, 1925], especially, we find florid characterizations of Nātha as a compassionate bodhisattva:

> Friend, depart after seeing Lord Nātha who is celebrated throughout the entire world, who incessantly perfects himself in those virtues which make a buddha,

> who has the avowed goal of leading to the city of nirvāṇa the countless beings who have fallen in the unfathomable ocean of saṃsāra and wander in distress [stanza 230].

Verse 230 seems to have perfectly preserved the bodhisattva ethos of Avalokiteśvara's actions.

Verses 251 and 252 of the *Girā Sandēśaya* are yet more explicit and link Nātha to the role of protecting the longevity of the Buddhist tradition, a role traditionally ascribed to Avalokiteśvara in Mahāyāna literature. The former verse contains the ostensible raison d'être of the poem per se: that Śrī Rāhula pray to Lord Nātha, the one who has "divine eyes" and a compassionate nature, to ward off all enemies, poisons, disease, and malevolent spirits so that the victories of Parākramabāhu VI and the prosperity of his kingdom be assured and increased. The latter verse eulogizes Nātha as the famous protector of the *sangha* (e.g., the *Sangharatna*) in Sri Lanka until the appearance of the next Buddha, 5,000 years after the *nibbāṇa* of Gotama when Maitrī is expected. What is interesting about this particular passage is that this role is traditionally ascribed to the god Upulvan in Sinhala Buddhist monastic chronicles. But in this case, we note that Mahāyāna traditions have been followed, indicating, perhaps, a key instance of assimilation and localization (the power of Avalokiteśvara as Nātha supporting and protecting Parākaramabāhu).

While this last instance clearly demonstrates the assimilation of Mahāyāna bodhisattva conceptions for the sake of royal legitimation, it is impossible to ignore the extent to which Hindu *brahman*ical tradition also made a lasting impact on Sinhala Buddhism during this period. During the Kotte and Gampola eras, Hindu *brahmin*s predominated at the seats of shrines dedicated to the higher deities of Sri Lanka. It was during this time that Sinhala deities took on more and more of the attributes of the Hindu high gods as these are depicted in the Sanskrit *purāṇa*s. Upulvan and Kataragama Dēviyō became identified with Viṣṇu and Skanda. Sanskrit literature was also widely studied in the curricula of *gamavasi pirivenas,* and, as we have noted, the form of *sandēśaya* literature itself, although written in pure Sinhala, seems to be inspired by the classical Sanskrit poetry of Kālidāsa. In Chapter 2, I have mentioned the iconographic influence of Śiva and Durgā on the sculpting of Avalokiteśvara and Tārā figures in the seventh through the tenth centuries.[10] There is little doubt that Hindu conceptions of high gods during this period further colored the character of Nātha.

In *sandēśaya* literature, there is one particular reference to Nātha that belies a continuing association with Śiva. In verse 11 of the *Girā Sandēśaya,* Śrī Rāhula's Vijayabāhu Pirivena at Totagamuva is compared to the city of Kuvera (the Vedic god of wealth), which shines in purity by means of the

bright rays issuing from Mount Kailāsa (Śiva's abode). In the same manner, bright yet soft white rays of light emanating from Nātha's body bathe Totagamuva in resplendent brilliance. In a similar vein, but linking Nātha to an epithet of the historical Buddha in the *Parevi Sandēśaya,* Śrī Rāhula has referred to the god Nātha as *divayusuriya,* "kinsman of the sun" [S. de Silva, 1900: verse 76]. These two instances reflect how Buddhist and Hindu motifs were often mixed in *sandēśaya* literature, mirroring the larger process of religious and cultural synthesis at work. Sometimes the Sinhalese gods are directly likened to the great deities of *purāṇ*ic or *brāhman*ic tradition. At other times, their eventual spiritual fates, especially in connection with Nātha and Saman, are linked to that of the buddhas. Nātha and Saman, then, seem to be functionally efficacious in this world, but they are also destined to become buddhas. They retain both *lōkōttara* and *laukika* significance. Bodhisattvas, gods, and kings are seen as inseparably linked cosmically and politically.

It would seem, however, given a reference to Nātha in *Girā Sandēśaya,* verse 198, that Nātha is envisioned as superior to all of the other Sinhala gods in the divine pantheon and hence the closest to buddhahood. In this verse, the waves breaking on the seashore at Totagamuva are said to weep as the result of the ocean having lost its most precious jewel to Viṣṇu. The grieving and complaining waves appeal to Nātha to rectify their loss, thus suggesting that Nātha is superior to Viṣṇu in the divine hierarchy of power. Such a motif presages the manner in which Nātha is later ranked in the Sinhala divine hierarchy of the Kandyan period and reflects the attempt on the part of the Sinhalese to at once incorporate Hindu conceptions of divine power (for *laukika* matters) while retaining Buddhism as a superior path to ultimate spiritual salvation (*lōkōttara*). The power of Nātha was seen to span these orientations in later *sandēśaya* literature as he remains a boon-conferring deity on the one hand and a bodhisattva aspiring for buddhahood on the other. His compassion in the former does not detract from his attainment of wisdom in the latter.

It is interesting to note that if there is a historical figure who seems to span this very orientation in his own life and works, cutting the figure of *laukika*-oriented power who also symbolizes the highest spiritual aspirations of Theravāda monastic Buddhism (*lōkōttara*), it is Śrī Rāhula himself: the royal *bhikkhu.* That is, the figure of Śrī Rāhula seems to represent an intersection between the more popularly oriented practices of medieval lay religion and the normative aspirations for enlightenment among the monastic *sangha.*

Śrī Rāhula seems to have been an extraordinarily learned *bhikkhu.* His *Pañcikāpradīpaya* is a technical exegetical study of Pāli grammar reflecting an outstanding linguistic ability.[11] In this work, Śrī Rāhula also draws on Sanskrit and Tamil sources to bolster his assertions. It is also clear that he was

familiar with Sanskrit epic literature, the *Veda*s, and the *Purāṇa*s. His reputation as an expert in languages and literature appears to have attracted a number of pupils to Vijayabāhu Pirivena from throughout Sri Lanka and beyond.

One of his most illustrious students, Śrī Rāmacandra Bhāratī, a *brahmin* from Bengal who had studied widely in India before coming to Totagamuva, wrote a commentary to the *Vṛttaratnākara,* a well-known grammatical work on *chanda*s (Sanskrit prosody), which won him special recognition from Parākramabāhu VI upon the recommendation of Śrī Rāhula [Silaskandha-Mahāsthavira, 1926]. In this commentary, the only four verses in Sri Lankan literature referring specifically to Avalokiteśvara are found. These verses, written to illustrate four types of meter, reveal that Avalokiteśvara, worshiped as Nātha at Śrī Rāhula's *pirivena,* retained his bodhisattva identity. The curriculum at Sri Rahula's *pirivena* seems to have been sufficiently sophisticated and inclusive that the deities of Sanskrit literature (the *Veda*s, *Purāṇa*s, the Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, etc.) must have been known at least from literary contexts. These verses have been translated by Paranavitana [1951] as follows:

> May Avalokiteśvara, the Refuge of the virtuous and the Ocean of Compassion, remove my suffering—he who endeavors, day and night, to deliver beings plunged in the midst of the great sea of saṃsāra.
>
> May this Avalokiteśvara, who has compassion for the lowly and the poor folk, protect thee—Avalokiteśvara by whose lustre, equal to the radiance of millions of autumnal moons, the three worlds appeared like the Ocean of Milk.
>
> I now worship Avalokiteśvara, the Lord of Prosperity, who is as beautiful as the autumnal moon, or as the jasmine flower, or snow, or the garland of pearls, or the lance, or quicksilver, who holds in his hand a rosary and a jewel lotus, who wishes well the whole world, who has, as his crown, a figure of the Conqueror (i.e. Buddha), who is the foremost teacher, and who is adorned with ornaments like the jaṭā-makuṭa.
>
> The all knowing and the incomparable Lord Avalokiteśvara, assuming that this action affords protection to the world, daily removes fear; hence, having known that he is compassionate towards the lowly and the poor, I go for refuge to that Lord, who is the abode of my rejoicing, and who is indeed the foremost among Bodhisattvas. May you and all people who desire heaven and the final beatitude go at once for the accomplishment of your aims to that Teacher. May it be well! [15–16].

These verses are not only significant in relation to their time and place (clearly linking the cult of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara to Śrī Rāhula, his student at Totagamuva, and to Parākramabāhu VI), but they are also a remarkable portrayal of the bodhisattva, reflecting a clear Mahāyāna understanding. They also reflect a familiarity with the iconographic features usually associated with

Avalokiteśvara in Sri Lanka, features totally consistent with the very same iconographic attributes of Nātha found in the *Śārīputra* (a text on iconometry used by the image makers in service to Sinhala royalty since at least the thirteenth century).

Śrī Rāhula was a celebrated Sinhala poet and linguist with a vast knowledge of classical Pāli Buddhist and Sanskrit Hindu literature; he seems to have been an enthusiastic devotee of the gods (especially Nātha, who also may have been regarded as the patron deity of his Vijayabāhu Pirivena at Totagamuva) and he may have been a practitioner of astrology and occult arts [Wijesekera, 1934: viii–ix]. The complex religious profile of Śrī Rāhula may be regarded accurately as a microcosm of the "total field" of religion in Sri Lanka at his time.

That Śrī Rāhula's perspective was appreciated by the royal court is in clear evidence from the *Cūlavaṃsa*'s account of Parākramabāhu VI's wide-ranging and eclectic religious accomplishments [Geiger, 1953, vol. 2: 215–18]. He continued his support for the orthodox Theravāda *vanavasi* tradition while at the same time supporting the religious aspects of the *gamavasi* orientation embodied by Śrī Rāhula. Of specific interest is the fact that among his many religious dedications, Parākramabāhu VI set up the Papiliyana monastery at the royal capital to commemorate his mother. The dedicatory inscription records very generous endowments for the purpose of daily propitiations of Nātha [Paranavitana, 1929: 58] and refers to the construction of a Nātha image in the company of Maitrī.

We have noted earlier that Nātha and Maitrī were regarded by Parākramabāhu II of Dambadeniya as "protectors," and as late as the eighteenth century, the two bodhisattvas appear in sculpted triads with the Buddha at Dambulla as well as at the Asgiriya *Vihāraya* in Kandy. Their presence here at the royal monastery in the capital would seem to indicate that the understanding expressed in the *Girā Sandēśaya* regarding the past realization, present protection, and future embodiment of the *dhamma* had become normative.

Nātha and Prince Sapumal (Bhuvanekabāhu VI)

With the death of Parākramabāhu VI, there is little documented mention made of Śrī Rāhula. Traditional lore asserts that he traveled to India and China [Wijesekera, 1934: x–xi]. It would seem that he gave up ties to the royal court upon Bhuvanekabāhu VI's murder of Parākramabāhu's grandson and expected heir to the throne, Jayabāhu II. With Parākramabāhu VI's demise and the ascension to power of Bhuvanekabāhu VI, Śrī Rāhula lost, perhaps, his own power base at the royal court. Bhuvanekabāhu VI appointed a new *rājaguru* (the last monk to hold that title until the establishment of the Kandyan king-

dom by Vimala Dharma Sūrya I in the late sixteenth century). When a group of Theravāda *bhikkhus* from Burma came to Sri Lanka to reestablish the purity of *vanavasi* lineage of the *sangha* in that country, Śrī Rāhula did not participate in these ordination rites, which, symbolically at least, might have called into question the validity of his own *gamavasi* lineage of ordination.

Bhuvanekabāhu VI, a non-Sinhalese who originally seems to have come from a south Indian family of royal caste status on the Tamil east coast of the island [Ilangasinha, 72], claimed (in the Dedigama rock inscription) to have been an adopted son of Parākramabāhu VI [*Epigraphia Zeylanica,* vol. 3: 278] and therefore a stepbrother of Śrī Rāhula. In *sandēśaya* literature, he is the heroic Prince Sapumal, who, according to the *Girā Sandēśaya* [Sugatapala, verse 136ff.], was dispatched to the Jaffna peninsula by Parākramabāhu VI to drive the Hindu Āryacakravarti (associated with the Vijayanagar dynasty) from the island in the king's most celebrated military victory. Both Śrī Rāhula's *Seḷalihiṇi Sandēśaya* (Wijesekera, 1934: verse 29) and the *Kōkila-sandēśaya* (Gunawardhana, verse 87) are generous with adulation for Sapumal's triumph, a victory that must have actually occurred in about the middle of the fifteenth century and united the island under Parākramabāhu's rule. Moreover, the *Kōkila-sandēśaya* ostensibly is a message from the chief *bhikkhu* at the Devinuvara *vanavasi pirivena* to Sapumal while he was administrating in Jaffna. For 17 years, Sapumal ruled over the Jaffna peninsula on behalf of Parākramabāhu VI before returning to Kotte upon the king's death to stake his claim to the country's throne.

Although Bhuvanekabāhu VI appointed a *vanavasi bhikkhu* as his *rājaguru,* he seems to have attempted to follow the eclectic religious policies of Parākramabāhu VI. As noted previously, he is traditionally associated with the founding of the Nātha *dēvālaya* at Doravaka. In addition, it is said that he founded the Nātha *dēvālaya* at Hunapahura in thanksgiving to the god for successfully leading him to victory over the Jaffna Āryacakravarti. Tradition further asserts that he began his march to Jaffna from underneath a Nā tree still located today at the Nāga Rājamahāvihāra in Kotte. If it is true that he attempted to follow the religiopolitical policies of his stepfather, in this instance they seemed to have resulted in failure, for Bhuvanekabāhu VI's short reign of 6 years (1470–1476) was marred by political disintegration and warfare.

Following Sapumal's departure from the Jaffna peninsula, the Āryacakravarti, who had been in exile in India for 17 years, returned with his forces to regain control. Bhuvanekabāhu VI also faced a rebellion in Udarata (the Kandyan region) by Senāsaṃmata Vikramabāhu, who had proclaimed independence, thus beginning the legacy of political autonomy in the Kandyan region. It is also known that the Theravāda monks from Burma, who were

destined for Kelaniya, were diverted to Galle rather than landing farther north, due to an uprising on the southwest coast. They were further delayed in making their trip overland along the west coast north to Kelaniya because of instability in the region [Godakumbura, 1966].

It is difficult to ascertain why a unified Sri Lanka would begin to unravel so quickly following the death of Parākramabāhu VI. Political realities in south India were no doubt a major factor. But it would seem reasonable to speculate that in addition to the passing of an enormously popular and powerful Sinhalese king, Bhuvanekabāhu's problems were also the result of his own ethnic non-Sinhalese origins on the one hand and his alienation of the *gamavasi* fraternity on the other. Whatever the case may have been, his reign marked the beginning of more political instabilities, which lasted until the legitimate royal establishment of the Kandyan kingdom in the up-country by Vimala Dharma Sūrya I at the end of the sixteenth century. Even then, the fortunes of the Kandyan rulers were nothing short of precarious as measured by any standards.

From Kotte to Kandy: An Interlude of Political History

With the passing of Parākramabāhu VI, Śrī Rāhula, and Prince Sapumal during the cultural renaissance of the early Kotte era, there are no more historical references to Nātha to be found in the available sources.[12] The cult of Nātha seems to have been dealt a major blow in the low country with the coming of the Portuguese to the island in the early sixteenth century. Only with the establishment of Sinhala kingship in Kandy does he again resurface as a significant figure associated with royal interests.

Indeed, aside from a single instance in relation to the first of the Kandyan kings, Vimala Dharma Sūrya I, there are no literary or artistic traces of the cult of Nātha in any part of Sri Lanka from the late fifteenth century until the eighteenth-century reign of the last of the ethnically Sinhala kings, Narendra Siṃha (1707–1739). Moreover, Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara's identity per se seems to have vanished completely from the cultural history of Sri Lanka, being completely subsumed into that of the emergent national guardian deity Nātha Dēviyō during this later period.

In the case of Vimala Dharma Sūrya I, the single reference to which we have referred is but an indirect one. A picture of this particularly important king of Kandy in the company of a Dutchman in the late sixteenth century was first published by Ananda Coomaraswamy in his *Medieval Sinhalese Art* [1956: Plate xxiii]. It shows Vimala Dharma Sūrya I wearing a royal chapeau with a buddha image on its crest, a buddha in the crown. He also holds a lotus

in his hand. The publication of this print has led art historian Nandana Chutiwongs to assert "that the Kandyan kings—or some of them at least—regarded themselves to be the earthly manifestation of Nātha, their dynastic god" [83]. Given the needs for religiopolitical legitimation at the time of the founding of Buddhist kingship in Kandy, it is not surprising that Vimala Dharma Sūrya would have presented himself publicly in a manner that emphasized symbols projecting the image of the bodhisattva/god/king. Before we examine some of the salient facts of his paradigm-setting reign, we need to account historically for the political succession of kingship from the time of Bhuvanekabāhu VI at Kotte (1470–1476) to Vimala Dharma Sūrya's inauguration in 1592 and beyond that time to the early- eighteenth-century reign of Narendra Siṃha, when, as we shall see, the fate of Nātha takes another interesting twist.

As noted earlier, following the unified rule of Parākramabāhu VI at Kotte and the emergence of Prince Sapumal as King Bhuvanekabāhu VI, the Hindu Āryacarkarti returned from south India to reestablish power over the northern ethnically Tamil-dominated peninsula of Jaffna. Subsequently (in 1474), independence was declared in the up-country Kandy region by a renegade general, Senāsaṃmata Vikramabāhu, who had previously served under Parākramabāhu VI of Kotte but now refused to accord sovereignty to the kingship of Bhuvanekabāhu VI (Prince Sapumal). Political rule over the island was divided again into three kingdoms.

Fifty years later, in 1521, political rule on the island was further splintered when Vijayabāhu VI of Kotte was murdered by his three sons, who then proceeded to divide his kingship over the southwestern region of the island among themselves. One of Vijayabāhu's sons, who became Bhuvanekabāhu VII (1521–1551), continued to rule from Kotte while his brothers, Vīdiyē Baṇḍāra and Māyadunnē, held court at Rayigama (the old home of the Alakeśvaras) and Sitavaka, respectively. Vīdiyē Baṇḍāra died after a very brief rule, and his principalities were soon annexed by Māyadunnē. A long fratricidal struggle then ensued between the ambitious Māyadunnē and Bhuvanekabāhu VII. During these 30 years of Bhuvanekabāhu's rule at Kotte and Māyadunnē's rule at Sitavaka, the Kandyan kingdom was left largely undisturbed (and undeveloped) while the royal brothers to the south and west concentrated almost all of their efforts upon dislodging one another. In the meantime, the Portuguese, who originally came to Galle in 1505, had begun to set up trading and missionary outposts along the west coast and were poised to begin their own efforts at bringing the island under the sovereign control of the king of Portugal, whose forces claimed to be acting on behalf of the Roman Catholic church.

In 1551, when Bhuvanekabāhu VII died, he bequeathed his throne to his

favorite grandson, Dharmapāla, who had been educated by the Portuguese and baptized as a Roman Catholic. Upon Dharmapāla's consecration, the traditional palladium of the Sinhalese people, the *Daḷadā* (relic of the Buddha), was spirited away to Sitavaka. During the early years of his reign, Dharmapāla deeded the sovereignty of the island to the king of Portugal and seems to have abetted the Portuguese politically and economically in every manner possible. As a result, from the time of Dharmapāla's consecration, Sitavaka and its "king" (Māyadunnē) became rallying forces of Sinhala Buddhist claims to power on the island in opposition to the growing political and religious influence of the Portuguese at Kotte. Māyadunnē was a skillful general of his troops, given his many years of experience in tactical warfare waged against his brother, and he succeeded in consistently confining the power of the Portuguese and their "puppet king" to the surrounding environs of what is now modern Colombo.

In 1581, when Māyadunnē's very aggressive son, Rājasiṃha I, became the Sitavaka-based Sinhala claimant to kingship, the religiopolitical situation on the island suffered further convulsions. Rājasiṃha, like his rival Dharmapāla in Kotte, had forsaken Buddhism but had converted to Śaivite Hinduism instead of Christianity. His first significant political act as sovereign was to declare Kandy annexed to Sitavaka. Rājasiṃha's declaration and intention of subduing Kandy had been brought about in part due to a marriage alliance that had been forged between the military ruler of Kandy, Karalliyaddē Baṇḍāra (grandson of Senāsaṃmata Vikramabāhu), and the Portuguese-dominated Dharmapāla. Indeed, Karalliyaddē had betrothed his sister as a queen to Dharmapāla, thereby raising the possibility of an heir laying claim to both Kotte and Kandy and, in the process, making Rājasiṃha the odd man out of the contemporary triangular Sinhala political power plays. When Kandy came under attack by Rājasiṃha's forces, Karalliyaddē and his family, including his young daughter and nephew, fled to Mannar on the northwest coast to seek Portuguese protection. There, Karalliyaddē died and his daughter (Kusumāsana Dēvī) and nephew (Yāmasiṃha Baṇḍāra) were baptized as Dona Catherina and Dom Philip, respectively. At this time, then, there were no royal powers supporting the Buddha *sāsana*.

Rājasiṃha I was now at the apex of his power and began a concerted military siege of Colombo in a valiant attempt to eliminate the colonial Portuguese presence. For a year (1587–1588), the Portuguese military forces were very sorely pressed to the point of barely being able to hold out within the walls of the Colombo Fort. Only a naval link to Goa saved them from total extirpation. In an act born of seeming desperation, the Portuguese decided to send a diversionary expeditionary force from Mannar to Kandy with the idea of installing a new king (Dom Philip) on the "Kandyan throne." Almost

immediately after a hastily contrived installation, Dom Philip died suddenly and Konnappu Baṇḍāra, who had become the chief of the Portuguese military forces in Kandy, declared himself king of Kandy as Vimala Dharma Sūrya I in the Christian year 1592. The Portuguese ploy was to have major consequences: the birth of a 220-year succession of Kandyan kings.

Once Konnappu Baṇḍāra became Vimala Dharma Sūrya I, he faced two fundamental problems. The first was the establishment of military security for the Kandyan region, while the second was the establishment of royal legitimation in the eyes of Sinhalese subjects. In the first instance, Konnappu Baṇḍāra "had acquired a reputation for his military skill" [Dewaraja, 1971: 16]. His father, also a military officer, who had been victorious in service to Sitavaka's Rājasiṃha but later suspected of treason by the king, had been put to death on Rājasiṃha's orders. Thus, in Konnappu, the Portuguese perhaps saw an ideal leader, in terms of personal motivation and professional skill, for the diversionary force they sent to Kandy. Ironically, for the Portuguese, Vimala Dharma Sūrya demonstrated the skills of his tactical military prowess very well but against them, when he subsequently and decisively defeated them 2 years later in 1594 at the famous battle of Danture.

But there were other events besides his spectacular military victories that strengthened Vimala Dharma Sūrya's hold over Kandy. In 1591, the Portuguese had successfully deposed the last of the Hindu Āyracakravartis on the Jaffna peninsula, thus removing another separate source of potential threat from the north. Then, in 1593, Rājasiṃha I of Sitavaka unexpectedly died. With his death, brutal familial feuds led to the rapid disintegration of the Sitavaka "kingdom," part of which was annexed by the aging Dharmapāla and the Portuguese in Colombo and part of which was ceded to the forces of Vimala Dharma Sūrya. In 1597, Dharmapāla finally died after a 46-year "rule," and the coastal regions of the island fell indisputably into the hands of the king of Portugal. This resulted in the beginnings of a coastal Sinhala Roman Catholic and semi-Westernized subculture that has survived to this day, especially just north of modern Colombo. But at the time, this situation left Vimala Dharma Sūrya I as "the sole surviving Sinhalese king" [Dewaraja, 17].

While political and military developments seemed to have solidified Vimala Dharma Sūrya's position in the eyes of many traditional Sinhalese, the king still faced serious problems of legitimation. He had not been born of royal stock and had come to power through the shrewd exercise of his political savvy, his military skill, and the fortunate timing of capital events. Following his defeat of the Portuguese at Danture, he married Dona Catherina (Kusumāsana Dēvī), the daughter of the deceased Kandyan potentate Karalliyaddē. It is significant that the next ruler of Kandy, Senarat, a village

headman from Matale and a cousin of Vimala Dharma Sūrya, also married Kusumāsana Dēvī. Further, upon Kusumāsana Dēvī's death in 1612, Senarat proceeded to marry her daughter by her first marriage and then, with the first daughter's death in 1617, Kusumāsana Dēvī's second daughter by Vimala Dharma Sūrya. The next and most enduring of the Kandyan kings, Rājasiṃha II (1635–1687), was the son of Senarat and Kusumāsana Dēvī. These marriages reveal that matrilineal descent became the recognized institution of royal legitimation in the Kandyan kingdom. While Dewaraja [18] points out that matrilineal descent also had been the rule of succession for Parākramabāhu I of Polonnaruva and Parākramabāhu II of Dambedeniya, in this instance it was undoubtedly invoked in order to legitimate the weak claims to royalty of the new Kandyan dynasty. It is also clear that Kusumāsana Dēvī provided an acceptable vital royal link despite the fact that she was a baptized Roman Catholic.

The implications of Dona Catherina's (Kusumāsana Dēvī's) formal religious affiliation were not lost upon Vimala Dharma Sūrya. While he managed to successfully address the royalty-by-birth issue of his kingship by means of his marriage to her, the problem of the relationship between kingship and Buddhism remained. Indeed, for several generations previous to his reign, Buddhism had been relatively neglected by royalty: Dharmapāla of Kotte had converted to Roman Catholicism, Māyadunnē was not an especially religious man, and Rājasiṃha I had converted to Śaivite Hinduism (perhaps as a ploy to attract help from the Vijayanagar dynasty in south India). Concomitantly, institutional Buddhism (the *sangha*) was in such a sorry state of retrenchment and decline that it probably needed the support of Vimala Dharma Sūrya as much as Vimala Dharma Sūrya required concepts of Buddhist culture to solidify his royal legitimation in the eyes of most Sinhala people. Upon his defeat of the Portuguese in 1594, Vimala Dharma Sūrya expended great efforts to secure possession of the *Daḷadā* in order to bring it to Kandy, where he enshrined it as quickly as possible within the confines of his newly erected palace, thereby symbolizing the traditional symbiotic relationship between the religion of the Buddha and Sinhalese kingship. From this time until the disestablishment of Kandyan kingship in 1815 by the British, the kings of Kandy undertook as their fundamental task the defense of traditional Sinhalese culture in general and Sinhalese political power in particular; they regarded themselves as the prime defenders of the Buddhist *sangha* empowered by their possession of the Buddha relic.

While Kandyan royal palaces were sometimes constructed in regions as distant as beyond Hanguranketa and Kundasale, all *Daḷadā Māligāvas* ("Palaces of the Tooth Relic") were built and rebuilt at the very same location originally selected by Vimala Dharma Sūrya I. This site, directly adjacent to

the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya,* had been very carefully determined. Current archaeological excavations on the site reveal several layers of construction that resulted from the temple's periodic sacking by colonial powers, especially the Portuguese.

Nātha, as we have pointed out, was earlier regarded as the "god of Senkadagala," the very small yet enormously significant ritual center of Kandy. At this time, it is likely that Nātha had retained his identity as a protective deity with the local inhabitants of the Kandyan region. We have seen how his status was enhanced during the Gampola period as a god who helped protect the fortunes of the *sangha* and the state. And, as long as the *Māligāva* was located adjacent to this specific *dēvālaya,* the Kandy Nātha Dēvālaya functioned as the veritable hub for synchronized ritual life sponsored by the king on behalf of the kingdom. In other words, it was precisely from this ceremonial center of the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya,* located directly across from the king's palace and the shrine of the *Daḷadā,* that divinely ordained power was ritually expressed through royally sponsored sacerdotal activities for the benefit and welfare of the kingdom. (These activities will be examined in detail in Chapter 7 in order to indicate how the ritual expression and ideology of a "pulsating galactic polity" [Tambiah's terms; see Tambiah, 1976: 102–31], which ultimately derived from the Hindu *devarāja* cult of Śrī Vijaya but had been transformed to become the Avalokiteśvara-*Buddharāja* cult in the thirteenth-century Khmer Empire by Jayavarman VII, were incorporated into the religiopolitical ritual life of the late medieval Kandyan kingdom.) The important point to be grasped now is that by donning the chapeau with the Buddha image in the crest, Vimala Dharma Sūrya clearly identified himself with the role and character of a this-wordly Avalokiteśvara/Nātha Dēviyō: a buddha-in-the-making protecting the spiritual, material, and political welfare of the nation. That is, the image that the king wished to project among his people was that he was bodhisattva/king/god acting on their behalf. It is very likely that the Kandyan custom of addressing the king as "Dēviyō" (god) was put to copious use and perhaps ceremonially routinized at this time as well.

Unfortunately, there is little information about specific religious activities initiated and then routinized during the reign of Vimala Dharma Sūrya, but it is known that the king appointed a *rājaguru* in order that he would become educated in the ways of religion. He also imported monks from Arakan (Burma) to reestablish the *sangha* [Dewaraja, 75, n. 89]. But while it seems to be the case that he attempted to patronize the *sangha* according to his means and abilities, his resources for such an undertaking must have been quite strained owing to his needs to constantly maintain a strong and vigilant military force.

Vimala Dharma Sūrya's more immediate successors, particularly Rā-

jasiṃha II (1635–1687) do not appear to have been particularly preoccupied with religion. Indeed, the history of institutionalized Buddhism in the seventeenth century seems to be one of even further atrophy and laxity in monastic discipline. A new class of lay holy men, *ganinnānsē* (married and not fully ordained Buddhist monks), arose to prominence during these times of *sangha* decline, especially among the emergent and ambitious nobility of Kandy, in evident ploys to regain control of valuable *vihāraya* properties donated by royalty for the support of the *sangha* [see Malalgoda, 1976: 57–58, and especially Kemper, 1984: 405–11]. Indeed, considerable tension between kingship and the nobles of Kandy seems to have become an enduring social and political fact of Kandyan courtly times; in one instance, Rājasiṃha II was forced to abandon Kandy altogether for a new residence/fortress above Hanguranketa some 20 miles to the southeast. Internal problems with the nobility continued to plague Rājasiṃha II despite the fact that during his reign the island-wide political fortunes of the Kandyan kingdom were fairly secure. In 1658, he colluded with the Dutch to finally drive the Portuguese from the island, thereby extending territorial jurisdiction of the Kandyan kingdom to include most of the east coast (from modern Trincomalee south), which the Portuguese had formerly controlled. Meanwhile, the Dutch, who controlled the west coastal lands of the island, "maintained the legal fiction that they were protecting the lands for the king in Kandy. The Dutch governor was 'His Majesty's humble servant' and the Dutch capital was 'His Majesty's city of Colombo' " [Dewaraja, 18]. Nonetheless, Knox [1984: 58–60] reports that, in 1664, the annual Äsaḷa Perahära in Kandy was not even celebrated by Rājasiṃha due to the precarious intrakingdom political situation that had been brought about by an attempted coup inspired by disgruntled Kandyan nobility. The continuing tensions between kingship and nobility had dramatic consequences for the future of the Kandyan kingdom and ultimately affected the future of Nātha Dēviyō in a decisive way, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

Dewaraja has aptly summarized the history of Kandy from the reign of Rājasiṃha II to the reign of Narendra Siṃha in the following way:

> After the death of Rājasiṃha, the story of Kandy is one of decline, both political and economic. The military strength of the kingdom dwindled. Rājasiṃha had led his armies into battle but his son Vimala Dharma Sūrya II (1687–1707) devoted his time to religious pursuits that had been neglected during his father's lifetime. His son, Śrī Vīra Parākrama Narendrasiṃha (1707–39), inherited neither his grandfather's warlike nature, nor his father's religious zeal, traits which had endeared them to the hearts of the people. With his death ended not only the dynasty of Senāsaṃmata Vikramabāhu, but also the long line of Sinhalese kings; for the next to ascend the throne was a youth from Madura, founder of the Nāyakkar dynasty [18–19].

During the reign of Narendra Siṃha, very significant social, cultural, and political transformations took place. These transformations are reflected in a myth of central importance to our religious study. It is to this important mythic material and to these issues that we shall now turn. They form a pivotal component and one that returns us directly to the substance of my argument.

5

The Mythicization of History: Nātha and Piṭiye in Kandyan Folklore

As ethnic identity has become an increasingly crucial factor within the political dynamics of postcolonial Sri Lanka, the study of myth and ritual within Sinhala Buddhist religiocultural tradition has become a veritably relevant, contemporary, and existentially significant concern to the academic community. In an attempt to understand the "logic" of recent ethnic violence, scholars are now analyzing the manner in which popular and paradigmatic mythic traditions, especially those originally articulated within quasi-historical monastic sources such as the *Mahāvaṃsa* and *Dīpavaṃsa*, have had a causative effect on the evolution of modern Sinhala political consciousness.[1]

While these studies help us to understand how traditional myths about Sinhala-Tamil conflicts of the ancient past have been resurrected and reapplied within modern political discourse to shape and legitimate recent Sinhala political views of the present, most have not attempted to identify instances in which these same ancient myths were reworked by the Sinhalese in attempts to adjust to or to explain their experiences and fears of political domination in earlier historical eras. In this chapter, I will refer to the manner in which the *Mahāvaṃsa*'s saga of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī's defeat of Elāra was epilogically extended in late medieval Kandyan traditions to account for the return of "threatening" Tamil power to Sri Lanka. In particular, I will cite mythic inventions and graftings of the early-eighteenth-century Kandyan period, when the last of the ethnically Sinhala kings, Narendra Siṃha, passed the Kandyan throne on to a non-Sinhala brother-in-law and, in the process, "abetted" in the establishment of "foreign" Nāyakkar rule. I will argue that two

related myths of central importance to the contemporary Kandyan Sinhalese cults of Nātha and Piṭiye Dēviyō functioned not so much as causative agents in the formation of political consciousness but as reflective expressions of the types of tensions constitutive of ethnic conflict per se.

Nātha's central shrine, as noted earlier, is considered the oldest surviving building in the city of Kandy and is located directly opposite the *Daḷadā Māligāva*, a venue continuing to reflect this deity's historical intimacy with the fortunes of Kandyan religiopolitical power. In contemporary Kandyan folklore, Nātha is still regarded as one of the four national "guardian deities" of Lanka. He is also popularly venerated as the next Buddha of the future, Maitrī. Piṭiye, on the other hand, is now regarded as a *baṇḍāra*-class deity who enjoys a popular following, especially in the regions of the Dumbara valley just across the Mahaweli Ganga to the immediate northeast of Kandy. The two related myths that I am concerned with form a key element in the mythic stratigraphy of both deities. Both relate a story of divine conflict and resolution, a story likely based on emergent historical realities.

The first mythic fragment helps to explain why Nātha, after several centuries as a boon-conferring up-country regional deity and a legitimator of Sinhala political rule, was "reelevated" within the hierarchical Sinhala Buddhist pantheon to a bodhisattva status. Historically, veneration of Nātha Dēviyō, as we have seen, devolved from the cult of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who was first introduced to the island's religious culture in the eighth century. We have also seen that, by the fifteenth century, he had become locally identified as the god of Senkadagala (Kandy) and had been fully assimilated as the divine protector of the political fortunes of the up-country Kandyan area. In this context, his original Mahāyāna "buddhological" or bodhisattva (*lōkōttara*) profile had been subordinated to his perceived worldly (*laukika*) political efficacy. In the mythic fragment to be examined, his "defeat" at the hands of the foreign newcomer Piṭiye signals a reversal of this process and a reorientation to his more specifically religious bodhisattva profile. It is the reassertion of Nātha's bodhisattva orientation that made possible his eventual and now contemporary popular identification with the next expected Buddha, Maitrī.

The first myth in question remains well known and is told in many variants in the Kandyan cultural area today. I collected/recorded no less than seven variations: five from contemporary oral traditions related by the *kapurāla*s and/or *basnāyaka nilamē*s of the Kandy, Pasgama, and Dodanwela Nātha *dēvālayas,* and from the *kapurāla*s of the two Piṭiye *dēvālaya*s located in Dumbara; and two from written sources probably dating from the early eigh-

teenth century. All versions agree on the basic outline of mythic events: Nātha Dēviyō was "defeated" in an ugly and unbecoming battle with a divine and foreign "newcomer," Piṭiye, and as a result of his "defeat" retreated to "higher ground"; he now spends his time concentrating on the attainment of buddhahood rather than fighting battles on behalf of the Kandyan Sinhalese, a role he previously enjoyed as attested to by several rock inscriptions dating to the 15th Gampola period.[2]

Initially, I will present mythic materials from my two written sources. The first is clearly derived from a perspective sympathetic to the cult of Nātha, while the second extols the powers of the newcomer Piṭiye. The first comes from a palm-leaf manuscript made available to me by a very old, locally famous, and traditional Kandyan dancer now living in the Dumbara valley.[3] The basic outlines of the myth are contained within a song/poem traditionally chanted by dancers before veneration of Nātha at local *mangālyayas*. When sung, the metered poem is particularly sonorous, and I have provided the romanized Sinhala in the Appendix.

Nātha Deviyange Täbime Upata

1. Give me permission
To drive away the yakṣa army
To come to the city of the gods
To offer betel to Nātha Dēviyō.

2. May I enjoy the heavenly pleasures
Underneath the splendor of his jeweled crown;
Entering the "craggy mountain,"
Send rays of your divine glance upon this dance arena.

3. Satisfied and having prepared the altar,
Having offered betel ceremoniously,
We have presented flowers to those gods
Who have assembled here.

4. Let him [Nātha] come
To this flowered altar
Through the clouds
Under the canopy and upon this very carpet!

5. Holding a solid gold and round jewelled pot in his right hand,
He glances, full of signs, from the Tuṣita heaven.
Arising like the full moon from behind the clouds,
Come through to this flowered entrance through the southern gate!

6. Wearing his golden crown and his robe three *yojanas* long,
His lightning garland of flowers shining on his shoulders,
Bearing a golden pot in his right hand,
Come, Lord Nātha. Sit on this bed of flowers!

7. Carrying your golden and jewelled pot in the right hand,
Your body contains the rays of the sun and moon.
Throwing your compassionate glances through the windows and doors,
O Lord Nātha, looking for this mansion of flowers, come riding in your chariot!

8. Sandalwood, fragrant flowers, scented water, musk and camphor,
Canopies above, curtains across, white parasols about,
Torches *yojanas* high made of gems with jewelled handles,
Prince of Heaven! Mighty Lord Nātha, you a like a jewel to the gods!

9. Protecting the city of lower Kelaniya,
Proclaiming: "Fire! Fire!" unto the *bhūtas* and *yakṣas*,
Having gained consent to become a buddha in a distant kalpa,
Nātha Dēviyō, Ratnatilaka, descend from the city of the gods!

10. Casting eyes upon the island of Lanka and everywhere in this world,
Divine grace of compassion, reminiscent of buddhahood,
Burn the afflictions of magic and sorcery and pour down a rain of flowers!
We offer betel, flowers and sandalwood.

11. Brilliant like a diamond mountain, holding the pot in hand,
Providing fearlessless to all while protecting all of Lanka,
His is a message for all cruel yakṣas to flee.
The altar is now decorated. Please come!

12. Aware of his aspiration to become a buddha, he now enjoys Tuṣita heaven awaiting his realization.
The lord of the Tuṣita city looks down upon us.
He destroys all of the people's afflictions [quelling] the *yakṣas* and *pisācas*.
Looking at this flower altar, cast your divine eyes on the betel leaves we offer.

13. Abiding in Tuṣita by virtue of fulfilling the ten *pāramitās*,
Destroy all danger, illnesses and contagious diseases.
With your power, send fire unto the *yakṣas* of this world.
Protect forever the *suras* and *naras*. Come to this flower altar!

14. Having gained merit worthy of heaven you now enjoy heavenly bliss.
Come down to earth with Yāma's retinue casting about your divine glance!
Dispersing all *yakṣa*s and spreading about your power and valor,
Destroy all danger and misfortune, cast down your divine eyes, and come to this flower altar!

15. Decorating this altar with sandalwood, camphor,
White umbrellas, curtains and canopies, and fanning it with linen,
With devotion I bow down before you with lowered head pleading pardon for any lapses on my part.
Cast down your divine eyes on my offerings of betel, tribute and altar. Please come at once!

16. Having held powerful sway over the city of lower Kelaniya,
Having enjoyed the offerings of *yakṣa*s oppressed with fear,
Having looked out from a distance with divine eyes,
The Lord of the gods arrives in the city of Senkadagala!

17. When meditated upon, the hearts of all become happy.
When seen, hearts tremble with fear and awe.
At once, raise the flags of victory, studded with gems and pearls,
That Lord of the gods, Nātha, comes with his divine army.

18. The Lord of the gods, compassionately looking upon the world with
His divine glance
Is pleased and has now come to Dumbara.
Like the clouds that come out of the sky,
Look at him now! How he exudes valor and power!

19. Having thus come victoriously,
He later resided in Senkadagala.
Living there contentedly,
An army entered the open space [Dumbara Valley].

20. With my hands to my head, I declare
That armies standing near and far stood poised and ready.
Whose makes those taunts causing fear?
[Are they] of the one [Piṭiye] who lives in Lower Dumbara?

21. On hearing those words, the Lord of the gods grew angry.
He summoned the army from Tāvatiṃsa heaven.
In his angry descent
He decided to wage a battle by calling him [Piṭiye] out.

22. War is made in the midst of the forest.
There are shouts and cries from the fighting armies.
Is there power and valor in the bow of the god?
He marches onward waging war.

23. Seeing such valor and power, the god Piṭiye,
With his army becoming frightened,
Looked around and thought strategically.
Whereby the flags of victory were raised.

24. Incapable of amity,
Breaking the legs of four legged creatures,
Throwing them at [Nātha's] army and causing them fear,
Lord Nātha lost the battle.

25. To free all sentient beings from the world,
And to complete his quest for supreme buddhahood,
He could not commit sin by waging further war
And returned to heaven to free all beings.

26. Going to the beautiful Pasgama mountain,
Like a golden [image] he climbs to his mansion with happiness.
Having created a street of gold,
There stands the beautiful mansion of Lord Nātha.

This poetic myth, still very well known in Dumbara as well as in the mountain village of Pasgama located 20 miles southeast of Kandy, functions as a "*sthalapurāṇa*" (myth about the sacred origins of the place) for the local Nātha *dēvālaya* in Pasgama. It has preserved both *laukika* (temporal) and *lōkōttara* (eternal) orientations of Nātha's original identity as the Mahāyāna bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, yet it clearly reflects a shift from the initial *laukika* emphasis of his power to eradicate demonic forces of chaos to his ultimate bodhisattva *lōkōttara* destiny in the poem's denouement. Before Nātha descends to do battle, the traditional motifs associated with Avalokiteśvara (light, compassion, and surveying/glancing/looking by means of "divine eyes") are continuously and abundantly stressed, leaving no doubt about the Mahāyāna bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara origins of Nātha Dēviyō. Indeed, these motifs provide the very rationale for why appeals are made to him for subduing the *yakṣas* and the *bhūtas*. He is a compassionate and responsive deity who maintains order in the face of *dukkha*-causing agents.

The *Nātha Deviyange Täbime Upata* is similar in content to portions of another poem entitled *Satara Waran Mal Yahana* ("Flower Altar of the Four

Guardians"), which Nevill [1954, vol. 1: 209] collected in the late nineteenth century and has briefly described. In this poem, according to Nevill,

> Nātha is invoked as residing at Kelaniya and holding a gem bangle in his right hand, as well as a golden bowl. . . . He burns up the *būtas*, *yaka*s and rides in a chariot. He will become *Budu*. He is also described as Ratnatilaka.

Nevill believed that this particular poem is about 3 centuries old. The late sixteenth century may be somewhat early, but what is important to us here is its similarity in detail to the *Nātha Deviyange* . . . , similarities that confirm the presence of certain this-worldly aspects of the cult of Nātha now largely forgotten in the interest of stressing the god's future attainment of buddhahood as Maitrī Buddha: specifically, Nātha's power to eradicate lower-world supernatural forces represented by the *yakṣa*s and *bhūta*s.

Nātha's association with Kelaniya (just northeast of modern Colombo) is of considerable interest.[4] By the fifteenth century, Kelaniya was widely known as the cultic seat of another national guardian deity, Vibhīṣana, just as, according to low-country traditions reflected in poetic *sandēśaya* literature, Devinuvara was sacred to Upulvan, Kataragama was sacred to Skanda, and Totugamuva was sacred to Nātha. Kelaniya remains sacred to Vibhīṣana today.

According to legends rooted in the Sanskrit epic *Rāmāyana,* which survived in popular Sinhala lore until the late Kandyan medieval period [see Seneviratna, 1984], Vibhīṣana is the brother of Rāvana, the epic's chief antagonist to the hero and heroine of *dharma,* Rāma, and Sītā. As the result of assisting Rāma in vanquishing his evil 10-headed brother Rāvana (the captor of Sītā and the king of the Lankan *rakṣa*s), Vibhīṣana is rewarded in the end by becoming Lord of Lanka and the leader of the now-domesticated *rakṣa* forces. This theme is similar to the protagonist Sinhala's taming of the *rakṣasī*s in the seventh-century Sanskrit *Avalokiteśvara-Guṇa-Karaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* and the Buddha's own domestication of *nāga*s and *yakkha*s in the *Mahāvaṃsa* and *Dīpavaṃsa.* Vibhīṣana's traditional and continuing portrayal in Sinhala folk art indicates his mythical past as a *rakṣa:* especially his long, fanglike teeth that protrude from both sides of his mouth. But as a benevolent deity residing at Kelaniya, he is frequently appealed to in fifteenth-century *sandēśaya* literature and is almost always included in the list of the four guardian deities of Lanka.[5] But dating back to at least the middle of the eighteenth-century reign of Kīrtti Śrī Rājasiṃha in Kandy, the gods Nātha and Pattinī have been substituted for Vibhīṣana and Saman, respectively. Despite the presence of the Vibhīṣana image at Lankatilaka and his mention within the Lankatilaka inscriptions of the early Gampola period, it would seem to be the

case that the cult of Vibhīṣana was much more widespread in the western and southern provinces, at least until the destruction of Kelaniya by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. As a benevolent king of the *rakṣas* (a class of demons that seems to have been an influential factor in the evolution of the *yakṣa* cult from one consisting primarily of benign tree spirits to one of disfigured devils causing misery and sickness), Vibhīṣana has been traditionally venerated as a deity who has special prowess in curing illnesses or afflictions caused by these malevolent spirits.

In the *Nātha Deviyange* . . . , verses 1, 9, and 11–14 contain references to Nātha's perceived power to drive away the malevolent *yakṣas*. Indeed, as we shall see, his rival, Piṭiye Dēviyō, is referred to as a *yakṣa* himself. Verse 16 refers to Nātha's power at Kelaniya and his propitiation by *yakṣas* "oppressed by fear." That Vibhīṣana is also regarded as a guardian deity of Lanka, that his seat of power has traditionally been at Kelaniya (at least since the fifteenth century), and that his chief claims to power involve mastery over the *yakṣas* would seem to indicate a considerable degree of conflation between Vibhīṣana and Nātha or, alternatively, that the this-worldly powers of Nātha were possibly modeled on those of Vibhīṣana. If the latter is the case, then the divine "personality profile" of Vibhīṣana may have been grafted onto the earlier bodhisattva character of Avalokiteśvara to help create the specified popular and medieval perception of Nātha's this-worldly "personality" and power. That is, Nātha was regarded not only as a protector of the Sinhala state and the *sangha* but as a power invoked to subdue malevolent forces as well.

It is clear that Nātha once figured heavily in the performance of exorcism rites. As a result of Kapferer's study [1983], it is now known that remnants of Nātha's role in low-country exorcisms remain evident today in the area around Galle.[6] Nevill also collected several ritual incantations in which Nātha's power is invoked to overcome the malevolent *yakṣa* forces. These include the *Sat Adiya Prāramba* ("Commencement of the Seven Steps") [vol. 1: 68], the *Ansapāda Mangalaya* ("Ode of the Measured Steps) [vol. 1: 141], the *Kaḍaturāwa Härīma* ("Removing the Curtain") [vol. 2: 75], and the *Halaṁba Santiya* ("Bangle Incantion") [vol. 2: 249]. Thus, the references within the *Nātha Deviyange* . . . to Nātha's ability to drive away the *yakṣa* forces are not novel, and yet they reflect an aspect of his cult that is no longer emphasized, for the most part, relevant, or sustained in the immediate Kandyan region. At Nātha's surviving *dēvālayas* in the up-country region, he has been scrupulously removed from involvement in sorcery or exorcism on the basis that he is too preoccupied with becoming a buddha to engage in such *laukika* forms of behavior. Curiously, it is precisely this *laukika* attribute of Nātha's that was negated by his "defeat" at the hands of the *yakṣa* Piṭiye, and, as a result, his power became dysfunctional or irrelevant to these lower, this-worldly, forces.

The *Nātha Deviyange* . . . contains the basic outline of events known to the fuller myth of Nātha's encounter with Piṭiye. Nātha is said to have come from low-country Kelaniya to Senkadagala (Kandy). This theme may refer to the fact that Sinhala kingship was shifted from the low country to the up-country, as Kelaniya was likely a most favored *vihāra* of the Kotte kings in the sixteenth century before kingship was established in Kandy. Barnett [1916: 67] notes that Nātha was "finally ousted" at Kelaniya by Vibhīṣana, a puzzling reference. Perhaps it simply indicates that Nātha, perceived as the same type of deity as Vibhīṣana, became installed in Kandy by devotees who had emigrated into the up-country region, but this is conjecture. Barnett makes no mention of low-country Totagamuva, the site of Śrī Rāhula's *pirivena* and the site often referred to as Nātha's cultic seat in the fifteenth century. The important point remains, though, that in the *Nātha Deviyange* . . . the Vibhīṣana-like, *laukika* orientation of Nātha's activity is finally deemphasized and even eclipsed within the total context of the poem. At the very least, it is ultimately subordinated to his bodhisattva significance.

While the *Nātha Deviyange* . . . is a clear instance of Nātha's cultic celebrity, other mythic and oral folkloric traditions regarding Nātha's confrontation with Piṭiye are told with much greater detail and embellishment. In unpacking the traditions that follow, it must be borne in mind that in contemporary Kandy this core myth is shared by devotees of both cults in mixed sympathy for both of the gods, although written sources tend to champion one deity over the other. Indeed, both Nātha and Piṭiye are venerated by many of the same Sinhala Buddhists. That is, the cults of both were finally integrated within the same religiocultural system. While Nātha and Piṭiye are part of the same religious pantheon, it will be seen that they are now perceived to act on different levels of the cosmos: Nātha is a deity on the verge of attaining buddhahood and as such occupies the highest tier (just below the Buddha) in the divine hierarchy; he is, as I have noted, increasingly inaccessible to pleas of a *laukika* nature. Piṭiye is a *baṇḍāra*-class deity, 1 of 12 gods beneath the four national guardian deities whose jurisdiction has been specifically localized (see Plate 38). He is eminently approachable for this-worldly types of assistance. Paradoxically, while Piṭiye is credited with defeating Nātha in battle, he was ultimately subordinated to him.

A celebrated poem containing related elements of the core myth is found within the *Doḷaha Dēviyangē Kāvi* ("The Poem of the 12 Gods"), which contains about 200 verses altogether, 37 of which recount the core myth of Piṭiye.[7] The relevant verses are translated here as follows:

He goes to Dumbara,
Sees the glade of Dumbara;

He shoots Rāma's arrows
And drives Nātha Dēviyō across [the river].

Protecting people
He comes in the golden chariot;
Having obtained the boon of gods,
Piṭiye Dēvī arrives.

On account of the great king of Soli [Chola],
He was born of the womb of princess Haliyapuli.
In this ceremony of seeking protection,
We offer betel to the Soli [Chola] prince.

In a customary manner a bed is made of Sal, Sapu and Nā.
At the news of his arrival, two yak tail fans are placed on both sides.
A bed covered with soft divine clothes is prepared;
May it please the Soli king to come quickly to this altar of flowers.

On hearing the woman's tale of the "Bull with a Broken Horn,"
King Gājaba, the ruler at Beligala,
Considered the Soli king with his contemptuous gaze;
Here is betel for the prince of Soli.

Into the royal family of Sinha of the Soli city
A great prince was born indeed;
He was a lord of war games
And was flanked by skilled followers.

The Soli prince ascended his chariot;
His skin shined like a red banana plant;
There, the disaster fell upon him, according to his past deeds.
Let us worship the Soli prince with pleased minds.

The cow laments in her motherly grief;
The shaking bell resounds plaintively;
A search for the doer of the injustice is made;
Then the afflicted prince comes forward.

For the cruelty meted out to the calf,
A cruel curse fell upon the prince accordingly.
The moment death fell upon him, a curse fell upon the city.
He, born as a yakkha, displayed his powers.

Gifts and offerings he received;
He punished and destroyed the enemies who speak the [Tamil?] language
Pondering over a suitable country all the while.
And he sailed away in a ship.

With mind well pleased, the prince set forth
Surrounded by Vaḍiga Tamil priests;
A flag was raised on the ship
Depicting Piṭiye Dēvī riding a horse.

Wondrous is the way the ship was built;
Wondrous are the followers on both sides;
Wondrous is the flag on the ship and
Wondrous is the Soli king on the ship!

He sailed passing the Blood Sea.
He sailed passing the Pearl Sea.
He sailed passing the Milk Sea
And forthwith reached the land of Sinhala.

Verily you have come from the Soli country.
Verily you have no regard for the low country.
Verily you are the demolisher of the World Mountain by the wind's power.
Verily you have come to Pata Bulatgama.

You have passed by the low country.
You have passed by Batticaloa and Vellassa.
With compassion you have come to Sinhale [up-country Lanka].
You have come looking for the hill of Uda Dumbara.

Like the cluster of stars in the sky,
An immense crowd has come from afar.
Ill feelings towards sword-bearers wearing turbans [Chola soldiers?]
You were compassionate and happy upon seeing Dumbara.

That comely prince stayed there,
A sportive boy in his youth,
His tresses were tied with a festoon of flowers,
That prince, Piṭiye Dēvī, has thus arrived.

When on his way to Yaggahapitiye,
The agitated yakkhas began to tremble.
There he slew deer and chased away Nātha Dēvī
Across the river to that side.

He cleared the land to settle at Udugoda,
Surveyed the feasibility of living in the jungle.
He built a three tiered mansion with proper proportions
And went to live in Mahaletenne.

The picture of Gautama Buddha was painted.
Who else to make all beings cross over from saṃsāra?
The picture of the god on horse-back under a parasol was painted.
Piṭiye Dēvī is like a curative medicine.

Like a vaṭadāgē, a stone wall was built on top of the rock
And a picture was drawn by a master craftsman
In the three tiered building open to the sky.
Lo and behold, the Soli king is like the sun and the moon.

The glade of Dumbara is called Piṭiye.
Those who venture there are surprised to see him.

There Piṭiye Dēvī sports day and night
And rests on the upper floor of the mansion.

Dambarawa is a magnificent field.
Bimbarawa is a magnificent field.
Of royal blood and destined to be the Buddha,
Piṭiye Dēvī is like a swan.

The prince of Soli came to this city
And looked for suitable field at Giragama.
There at Giragama with mind well pleased
Piṭiye Dēvī remained on horse-back.

At Amunugama, Pilavala and Gurudeniya,
The high queens did not realize his powers.
My verses are now disconnected;
[To these places] Piṭiye Dēvī visited.

He quells strife and remains unperturbed.
Often he goes along the river
Like a quick stream across the jungle.
Lo and behold, the gait of him!

Of our lord, well composed, who evokes delight,
The walk along the river is fine indeed.
Listen to my poems recited quietly.
The two elegant hands [of the Vaḍiga prince] are worthy of a kingdom.

Fully dressed and accompanied by a retinue,
Wearing flowers and buds about his tresses—
The flowers and buds of victory–
Behold the elegance of his arrival.

When he, this symbol of comeliness, arrived at Haragama,
The people, pleading for protection
Thronged at his feet.
Thus came the heroic Piṭiye Dēvī.

Having encircled the city with the retinue of yakkhas,
He appeared in a dream to the king
And declared that the city is beyond protection.
Thus the Soli king showed his powers [to the king].

He then proclaimed: "Make an enclosure at Gonawatte,
Collect deer and sambhur into the enclosure
And provide me with the flesh of deer and sambhur."
Thus did the Soli king display his power.

Seven amunus of rice were set aside,
A sword of silver was also made.
Sixty-seven king coconuts were also made ready.
With these offerings, the channel of Gurudeniya was cut.

Musical horns were blown at Rajavella,
From there a direct route was made to Gurudeniya.
Water on this course flowed right over the rock.
That blow of the sword will be remembered forever.

He then wore choice clothes and ornaments
And paraded with yak tail fans and parasols decked with pearls
To the music of five instruments and the trumpet.
His power is well established and understood by all.

Supplying water to a traditional field,
Where for a long time there was no channel.
Some used to graze animals there;
Behold how the channel was made at Gurudeniya.

Splinter after splinter was removed
And the rock became thinner and thinner.
Behold the mighty task done at Gurudeniya!
Rice sewn ripened like pears and [shined like] gems.

Piṭiye Dēvī, lord of this world,
Stood on the rock with his holy feet
Like a flower does not crush its petals;
There is a devale for him on the rock at Gurudeniya.

At the sociohistorical level, the poetic myth of Piṭiye, recounting his arrival in Lanka, his dislocation of Nātha, and his domestication within Sinhala popular culture, would seem to reflect the historical immigration of south Indian Tamils to the Kandyan cultural region during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and their subsequent social and cultural integration therein. The references to King Gājaba and to *vaḍiga* priests are the most obvious indications of this development. As Obeyesekere [1984] has pointed out in great detail, the myth of Gājabāhu's defeat of the Soli (Chola) king and his taking of 12,000 south Indian prisoners to Lanka

> explains the existence of South Indian settlers in parts of the Kandyan provinces and coastal regions. These settlers may have come for several reasons—through waves of conquest, peaceful immigration, or *being introduced by Sinhala kings themselves*. The myth, like other myths of this genre [i.e., the myth of Piṭiye], explains the existence of these groups, probably explaining their 'anomalous status.' . . . Even now there are communities of low subcastes of the *goyigama* (farmer) caste in the Kandyan area . . . who claim this origin. . . . The myth served as a useful mechanism for incorporating immigrant populations into the Sinhala social structure till recent times [366; emphasis mine].

The poem's references to "*vaḍiga* priests" is of specific significance to my argument, and I will address this motif shortly after a general commentary.

Piṭiye's confrontation with Nātha reflects ethnic tensions between the indig-

enous Sinhala inhabitants of Kandy and south Indian newcomers. Specifically, it reflects the tensions that existed between the Kandyan nobility and their king (Narendra Siṃha), who was sympathetic to the religious interests of his south Indian relations who were increasingly making their presence felt in the court of the Kandyan kingdom. On another level, this myth seems to indicate the further domestication of jungle lands for rice paddy cultivation carried out by the Kandyan kings with imported Tamil labor assistance and how rice farming supplanted hunting as the Dumbara region's chief economic vocation. Finally, there are elements reflective of caste conflict at issue here, too. We will return to a thorough discussion of these motifs, including that of the "*vaḍiga* priests," subsequently. But before doing so, other written evidence pertaining to these mythic traditions needs to be presented.

Nevill has cited four manuscripts that assume the general outline of the myth under consideration (with some embellishment) and proceed to continue the "career" of Piṭiye Dēviyō with alternative episodes. In the *Soli Kumāra Devi* ("Ballad of the Chola Prince"), the opening episode is further detailed: the cow's calf is beheaded by the prince's chariot, and the prince is decapitated in the same fashion by his father, the Chola king [vol. 3: 220]. In fact, this particular episode is first told in the 21st chapter of the *Mahāvaṃsa,* where the king's identity is none other than Elāra, the famous Tamil king who was defeated in battle by the Sinhala hero-king Duṭṭhagāmaṇī in the second century B.C. It is therefore an ancient tale, and our myth about Nātha and Piṭiye may be seen as a graft. (I repeatedly heard this part of the story emphasized in great detail in the oral village versions.) In the *Mahāvaṃsa* context, the story is meant to illustrate the great extent to which this righteous Tamil king upheld retributive justice in his kingdom. But in Sinhala popular culture, as the result of its context within the Duṭṭhagāmaṇī saga, Elāra eventually came to symbolize prototypical alien Tamil power that continuously threatens Sinhala political hegemony. Thus, Elāra's offspring (the prince who is reborn as Piṭiye) represents the continuation, or "rebirth," of that same potential power to dislocate the Sinhalese order, which is exactly what happens to Nātha in all versions of the myth. In the "Ballad of the Chola Prince," the killing of the calf and the prince's own decapitation are followed by a story about how he became a *yakṣa,* proceeded to Sri Lanka, and began to torment cattle. (It is interesting that to this day, Piṭiye is propitiated by some villagers in the Dumbara Valley in order to ward off diseases afflicting cattle; that is, his power over cattle has been assimilated and functionally domesticated by the Sinhalese.) There are more salient details to this version, including an episode about how 60 Buddhist monks were called together to chant scriptures for the cattle's protection. As they are ritually chanting, a dismembered leg from a bull is thrown into their midst by Piṭiye. Reacting hys-

terically, the monks begin to strike at each other's heads. In this version, the Buddhist monks parallel the confusion of Nātha's divine retinue in the *Nātha Deviyange* . . . and are, in the same way, rendered powerless in the face of Piṭiye's strategy. Thus, the myth takes on yet another dimension in its proclamation of power: Piṭiye is recognized as a power greater than that of Nātha (Buddhism) on this *laukika* this-worldly level. Or, to hedge the latter conclusion: Piṭiye's power is more appropriate on a lower level of the ordered cosmic hierarchy.

Another poem cited by Nevill [vol. 1: 49] entitled *Piṭiye Devi Kavi* ("Ballad of Piṭiye Dēviyō") assumes the basic outline of the core myth, including Piṭiye's royal origins in Soli (Chola India), his defeat of Nātha, and his takeover of Dumbara, and goes on to incorporate the details of yet another poem cited by Nevill [vol. 1: 25–26], the *Piṭiye Surindu Puwata* (immodestly entitled the "Story of Piṭiye: Chief of the Gods"). This source considerably amplifies the episode of Piṭiye's breaking up the rock to allow the fields of Gurudeniya to be cultivated. According to Nevill:

> In former days Sanda-Maha Nirindu, the King of Ceylon, had made an amunam's extent of land at Gurudeniya irrigable but the works were spoiled by a rock which interfered with the irrigation and could not be blasted away. In long years before that, when Wikum Bā rāja built Senkadagal pura, he also tried to tunnel through it, and failed. The Piṭiye Surindu then appeared to him [Nirindu], disguised as a brahmin, and said that if savory offerings were made and a golden sword were given to him with procession and state, he would break up the rock. The dream was followed by the offerings suggested, and the god in the evening struck the rock with the golden sword, and broke it to pieces. At daybreak, this was discovered and reported to the king. A dēvālē was built there. A sambur deer was sacrificed, and from that the village acquired its present name of Gonawatte or 'sambhur garden' [vol. 1: 25–26].

Nevill goes on to say that Piṭiye is also said to have broken up a rock at Kundasale (part of Dumbara) during the reign of Rājasiṃha II. Another episode refers to how Piṭiye once stole the bow of Narendra Siṃha when the king was about to shoot a deer. Later the bow was discovered inside a Piṭiye *dēvālaya*. Significantly, at the conclusion to the poem, it is stated that the poem was composed by one Dodanwela Kivindu by the order of Narendra Siṃha himself.

Having presented the various components of the core myth, we can proceed to unravel in more specific fashion its various strands of meaning. I will begin with the socioeconomic and historical significance of the myth, then proceed to its more specifically religious meaning as it is germane to the cult of Nātha, and in conclusion make some comments about the processes constitutive of the Sinhala penchant for inclusivity and domestication.

As noted, the core myth seems to reflect important ethnohistorical developments taking place at least as early as, if not earlier than, the first part of the eighteenth century, that is, before and during the reign of Narendra Siṃha, the last of the ethnically Sinhala kings. From the mythic material cited, it would appear that Narendra Siṃha, who in Sinhala popular memory is unlovingly remembered as the "playboy king" (because he is said to have been given over to wine, women, and song) was an ardent supporter and patron of the Piṭiye cult. Not only does he figure prominently in episodes of the "Ballad of Piṭiye Dēviyō" and the *Piṭiye Surindu Puwata,* but he was apparently responsible for having the latter text composed. Popularly, he was also known as "Kundasale Dēviyō." Kundasale is not only where he resided during most of his kingship, but it forms a significant part of the Dumbara region, where the cult of Piṭiye has remained important to this day.

The quest for Piṭiye's legitimation among the Sinhalese seems to lie in his perceived power to make rice cultivation possible, a means of livelihood regarded as economically and vocationally superior. For the Sinhalese, it is also a vocation that is superior in terms of caste status. Functionally, then, we see that Piṭiye's *laukika* power has been put to extremely good use: his association with paddy cultivation and his cattle-protecting prowess become the rationalization for his eventual assimilation and cultic integration by up-country Sinhalese. Ironically, Buddhist monks have been associated with being ineffectually engaged in practicing rites apparently designed to protect cattle. This tradition would also seem to belie an implicit Sinhala criticism of the *sangha:* it is not really a proper monastic interest to be involved in such this-worldly activities. The same criticism seems to be made of Nātha in the *Nātha Deviyange . . . ,* where it is said that he retreats to Pasgama and begins to concentrate on his bodhisattva quest owing to his desire not to commit further sin by waging war.

The irrigated rice paddies at Gurudeniya later became the royally owned chief source for providing rice that was (and still is) ceremonially distributed to the sacred places of the Kandyan kingdom. Yet Piṭiye, (meaning "ground" or "earth") eventually classed by the Sinhalese as being among the *doḷaha dēviyō* ("12 gods") that rank beneath the four guardian deities (which include Nātha) and above the village deities and the host of worldly spirits (*yakṣa*s, *būta*s, *holman,* etc.) is unlike most of the other *doḷaha dēviyō,* such as *Ganga Dēviyō* ("River God"), *Gala Dēviyō* ("Rock God"), *Kande Dēviyō* ("Hill God"), and *Kohomba Dēviyō* ("Tree God"—a very specifically important tree, *Azadirachta indica,* whose properties are used in Āyurvedic medicine), who are quite clearly nature divinities. Piṭiye is hardly a morally neutral power of nature. His malevolent power of the mature *yakṣa* type can be unleashed at any time unless he has been "satiated" through sacrifice and his

power thereby redirected beneficially. The kind of sacrifice and tribute demanded by Piṭiye is significant. He asks for meat, thus symbolizing his "lower" *yakṣa* origins, but he also demands the golden sword (*ran āyudha*), which, in Kandyan folklore, has come to be the chief symbol associated with royal and divine this-worldly power. The demand of the *ran āyudha* also symbolizes his demand for high caste (*kṣatriya*) recognition for a deity who functionally belongs on the *vaiśya* level. It is therefore likely that the opening episode of Piṭiye's myth linking his origins to royalty reflects this tension. It may also represent, as we shall see, the questionable caste status of south Indian royal immigrants in the eyes of elite Sinhalese.

But if Piṭiye may be taken to symbolize the social and historical reality of south Indian immigration to Lanka, the basic question remains: why would Narendra Siṃha, a Sinhalese king, want to propitiate him and legitimize him? Why would he want to acknowledge royal and divine power from this particular source? Consideration of this question leads us beyond the issues of hunting versus paddy cultivation and *vaisýa* versus *kṣatriya* in the regions surrounding Kandy, although these remain important parts of the larger picture. At issue, it would seem, is that the conflict between Nātha and Piṭiye represents a struggle to categorically define the suitability of the respective powers that these two deities came to represent within the context of religion and politics in the Kandyan kingdom.

As we have indicated, Narendra Siṃha was the last of the Kandyan kings of Sinhala ethnic origins. Following his demise in 1739, power was assumed by his brother-in-law, who originally came from Madurai in Tamilnadu. Thus, the last of the Kandyan dynasties, that of the Nāyakkars, became established on the throne. The background of these Nāyakkars and their previous relations to Kandyan kingship shed considerable light on the meaning of our mythic conflict.

The Nāyaks originally seem to have been Telugu administrative governors in the service of the Vijayanagar royalty ruling over south India from the fourteenth through the midsixteenth centuries. With the decline of central Vijayanagar power, many of these Nāyaks established themselves as independent powers. As Dewaraja [1971] reports:

> The spread of the Vijayanagar empire south led to a considerable emigration of men and women from the Telugu and Kanarese areas to the land of the Tamils. These settlers included not only the generals and soldiers who came in the wake of the viceroys, but also merchants, manufacturers, cowherds and peasants of all castes. . . . All these military adventurers with their dependents and adherents who accompanied the Vijayanagar [Nāyak] governors to the south came to be known by the general name of Nāyak. . . . There is no doubt that the original Nāyaks were the governing, land owning and military castes, but later

> the term was widened to include persons who by hereditary occupation were traders, artisans, oil mongers, palanquin bearers and even barbers and washermen. The waves of immigrants settling down in the country adopted the customs and manners of the more respectable [elements] of the community that surrounded them. The *Census Report of 1891* adds that at the time the term *nāyar* or *nāyak* implied . . . a connotation as *śūdra*. . . . Not only did the ruling chiefs of Madura and Tanjore bear this name, but their followers, many of whom belonged to the *tottiyam* caste whose *traditional occupation was the keeping of cattle* coveted the name Nāyak [21–22; emphasis and brackets mine].

Now, some of these Telugu-speaking peoples who immigrated to the far south of India eventually adopted the Tamil language, while others came to be known as *vaduga* ("northerner"). According to Dewaraja [23], Portuguese and Dutch sources refer to these peoples disparagingly as brigands, raiders, and thugs who were in the habit of plundering Christian converts. Portuguese sources also report that kings of Kandy, beginning with Vimala Dharma Sūrya I, sought military assistance from the *badagas*. Dewaraja adds:

> Perhaps, the military alliance paved the way for matrimonial alliances, for soon after this, in the reign of Senarat's successor, Rājasiṃha II, we see the beginning of a series of inter-marriages between members of the royal family at Kandy and the *vaduga* Nāyaks of Madura. The Sinhalese sources always speak of South Indian brides who came to the Kandyan court, as belonging to the *Vadiga-kula* of Madurapura. Evidently, the *badagas* of the Portuguese, the *baddagas* of the Dutch and the *vadugas* or *vadigas* of the Sinhalese sources, all refer to the body of Telugu speaking people who followed the Nāyak governors to the south and settled in the Tanjore Madura area, and many of whom adopted the name Nāyak [24].

In fact, Narendra Siṃha's mother and grandmother were Nāyaks from Madurai. Their relations had begun to pour into Kandy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. They were socially segregated from the Kandyan nobility. According to Dewaraja, Sinhalese were not allowed on the streets of their neighborhoods. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that serious tensions then existed between the south Indian immigrants and the Sinhalese Kandyan nobility. In this ethnically charged context, Narendra Siṃha contracted a marriage with the "ruling house" of Madurai. Dewaraja quotes the Sinhalese source, the *Mandārampura Puvata,* in this connection:

> The king contracted the marriage in order to quell the power of rebellious chiefs who were coveting the throne, and also to produce a pure royal line unmixed with nobility. Therefore, he ignored the royal maidens of Ceylon who were of 'mixed descent' and invited the daughter of the king of Madura [27].

She adds:

> More intermarriages with nobility would mean a further growth in the power of the Kandyan nobles who even at this time were a factor to reckon with. By introducing these south Indian elements to the court the kings were possibly trying to check the influence of the insubordinate Sinhalese nobles [27].

Indeed, another source cited by Dewaraja [32] indicates that Narendra Siṃha actually married two princesses from Madurai. However, she also discusses a Tamil document entitled *Narrative of the Affairs of Kandidesam* [32–34], which recounts how a Kandyan king, apparently Narendra Siṃha, was unsuccessful, on the basis of caste considerations, in his attempts to contract a marriage with the royal family at Madurai. In this document, it is claimed that his envoys eventually found a poor man of inferior caste status to accept the gifts of the Kandyan king, who in turn sent his daughter to Lanka to marry the king. No heir was born of this marriage, so upon the death of the king (Narendra Siṃha), the throne passed to his brother-in-law.

If these sources cited by Dewaraja are accurate, the concern over caste status and the attempts to royally legitimate Piṭiye make much more sense. Further, the tensions between the high-caste Kandyan nobility (symbolized mythically by Nātha) and Narendra Siṃha (whose low-caste relations seeking higher caste status are symbolized by Piṭiye) also fall into place. Indeed, caste consciousness appears to have become stronger during the Kandyan period, owing to the continued migration of a significant number of *brahmins* and *paṇṭārams* (chiefs; Sinhala: *baṇḍāra*) who had migrated from south India to the Kandyan area and eventually had taken up cultivation as a vocation. These *brahmins* and *paṇṭārams* intermarried with the indigenous Sinhalese and helped to sustain, in the process, the *govikula:* the high-caste, landowning, rice-cultivating class of which some two-thirds of today's Sinhalese identify themselves. It is out of a subgroup (*radala*) of this caste that the Kandyan nobility may have first arisen, and it is precisely this group, which had become "Sinhalized" and "buddhicized," that probably resisted Narendra Siṃha. It has to be further noted that another source of trouble for Narendra Siṃha was the *sangha,* the controlling ranks of which were dominated by this emergent Kandyan nobility.

Dewaraja [61–77] has further detailed many events of Narendra Siṃha's reign that led to a further deterioration in his relations with the Kandyan nobility, which itself seems to have become factionalized, with its own rivalries leading to the further decline of society and culture in general. Rebellions by the nobility, the king's reputedly tempestuous personality, his appointment of *vaduga* officials in charge of the royal stores and in charge over all of the royal villages populated by the Sinhalese, his tolerance of Roman Catholic missionaries, his continued welcome of *vaduga Nāyak* immigrants from south

India, and his total neglect of the Buddhist *sangha* such that it apparently had died out in 1729 all led to the general Sinhala perception that the reign of Narendra Siṃha was *adharmmiṣtha,* "not according to *dharma.*" Our poetic myths, then, which recount Piṭiye's defeat of Nātha and his subsequent assimilation into Kandyan culture, generally reflect these social, economic, and political tensions in this particular historical era. That is, they reflect recognition of political power having been given over to a foreigner, but a political power that was eventually subordinated.

But what of the myth's specifically religious significance? Nātha's "defeat" at the hands of Piṭiye is not at all understood as an important, definitive setback from the Buddhist soteriological perspective. Indeed, it is specifically the Buddhist soteriological perspective that transforms the meaning of Piṭiye's power and results in Nātha's proper "stationing" within the divine hierarchy—an advance toward his final spiritual accomplishment, as it were. To put the issue roughly, Nātha was "kicked upstairs" within the purview of the soteriological-cosmological umbrella. That is, Nātha's soteriological aim and status were further clarified as a buddha-in-the-making. While Piṭiye is also hailed as a buddha-in-the-making in the *Doḷaha Deviyange Kavi,* a development illustrating the thesis that alien deities were incorporated into Sinhala popular culture because of their functional utility only then to be legitimated by *lōkōttara* connections, Nātha is regarded in popular Sinhala culture as spiritually more advanced. Effectively, this is expressed in the *Nātha Deviyange . . .* by the reference to Nātha's desire not to commit sin by waging war, just as it is unbecoming of Buddhist monks to be engaged in the magical practice of protecting cattle. At the very least, neither Nātha nor Buddhist *bhikkhu*s are seen as wholly ineffective in these types of pragmatic concerns. Their efforts in these activities are inappropriate. It is not Nātha's "*dharma*" to wage war directly, to be the direct accomplisher of wholly *laukika* aims. Even within the context of the fourteenth-century Sagama rock inscriptions, his assistance to the political powers of Gampola to preserve the state and *sangha* is indirect: he appears in a dream to enlighten their strategies.

Nātha, then, is no warrior, though his power is such that it was perceived as legitimating royal power. In this specific case, however, even that function of legitimation with regard to Narendra Siṃha is eclipsed, for Narendra Siṃha obviously did not aspire to the image of the bodhisattva/king/god projected by some of his predecessors and revived notably by one of his Nāyakkar successors, namely Kīrtti Śrī Rājasiṃha. Nonetheless, it is perhaps just this eclipse that leads to Nātha's further definition and saves him *laukika* "oblivion."

Until almost the very conclusion of *Nātha Deviyange . . .* , that is, before his defeat at the hands of Piṭiye, Nātha's profile is consonant with the images

of both a guardian deity and a bodhisattva. Nātha was soon understood to be spiritually superior or spiritually more advanced than all other deities in the Sinhala pantheon. Within the reorganization of the Äsaḷa Perahära rites by Kīrtti Śrī Rājasiṃha several decades after the reign of Narendra Siṃha, Nātha was recognized as the next in line to become a buddha, a development that, once rationalized within the revived cosmology and buddhology of Theravāda tradition, led to his final identification with Maitrī.

But there is more to the religious significance of this myth. While it may indeed reflect the social, economic, and political realities we have noted above, and while it seems to anticipate the eventual "elevation" of Nātha within the pantheon, it also indicates a shift in religious concerns of a more pragmatic nature to those that are more ultimate. In other words, in the face of temporal defeat or subordination, ultimate spiritual victory is still championed and affirmed. The umbrella of the Buddhist soteriological perspective is here brought to bear on the events at hand. Nātha's identity as a protector of Kandy gives way to his association with the ultimate spiritual destiny of righteous Buddhists. The religious path of *dharma* is not to be finally equated with mundane political power, especially the sort epitomized by Piṭiye. In redefining the image of Nātha, our myths have remained faithful to those traditions that have associated the bodhisattva with righteous compassion. Nātha may have lost the immediate battle to Piṭiye, but he is expected to win the ultimate spiritual victory in the final analysis. With the establishment of foreigners on the Kandyan throne, this must have represented the rationalization of religious Sinhala Buddhists.

Inasmuch as Nātha is eventually regarded as the next buddha-in-the-making, we can conclude that the popular traditions of Sinhala Theravāda Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka succeeded in reviving and preserving the legacy of Mahāyāna's most outstanding religious paradigm: the ultimate salvation of all sentient beings through the compassionate altruism of a bodhisattva figure. Nātha is no longer famous for being a protector and legitimator, but now becomes a symbol of future spiritual hope. (But while this understanding became normative within Sinhala popular culture at large, many of his *laukika* associations actually remained vital elements of village religion in those hamlets where his *dēvālaya*s may still be found.)

In conclusion, we can point to Nātha's "restationing" and Piṭiye's assimilation as instances in which Sinhala tradition adjusted to the political realities of the day while incorporating the respective powers of each deity to their own advantage. Nātha's "restationing" represents the sustained Sinhala Buddhist claim for the spiritual superiority and the ultimate propriety of the Buddhist religious quest. Piṭiye's accommodation represents the Sinhala penchant for assimilation on the basis of pragmatic, *laukika* considerations. Piṭiye's legiti-

macy is then brought about by his subordinated association with this same soteriological quest. It is precisely the Nāyakkar identification with this Buddhist religious quest, so amply typified by the renaissance of Kandyan Buddhist culture under Kīrtti Śrī Rājasiṃha, that successfully legitimated their political power in the eyes of the Sinhalese in the following decades of the eighteenth century.

Appendix

The **Nātha Deviyange Täbime Upata**

1.	Ganṭa	avasara ma	ṭa
	Yanṭa	yaksen duruko	ṭa
	Enṭa	divyapuraya	ṭa
	Denṭa	dalumura Nātadevidu	ṭa
2.	Tunga	mini otu	nu
	Langa	divasiri	nu
	Banga	giriväs	nu
	Ranga	mandalaṭa diṣṭi hela	nu
3.	Tosva	pirisidu ko	ṭa
	Lasva	dalumura pudako	ṭa
	Räsva	deviyan ha	ṭa
	Pusva	pūjā keren devindu	ṭa
4.	Salā	salu viya	nē
	Elā	piyavili andi	nē
	Valā	gäba mädi	nē
	Balā	gena mal asna vaḍi	nē
5.	Dakunu	atē ganaran mini kalasa darana	ṭa
	Lakunu	ätuva helā diṣṭi tusita puresi	ṭa
	Makuna	valā sanda mandalak sēma udāko	ṭa
	Dakuna	vāsalin elibäsa maldora gāva	ṭa
6.	Ranē	kirulu tunga uvdiga saluva	andinavā
	Genē	vidulisāra maldama karē	dilenavā

	Genē	dakunu hasteṭa rankalasa	daranavā
	Anē	Nātadeviyani mal yahana	vaḍinavā
7.	Atē	dēva ganaran mini kalasa	darālā
	Gatē	candra sūrya āloka	vadalā
	Latē	diṣṭi janel dorin karunā	karālā
	Ratē	piṭin vaḍiya memal Madura	balālā
8.	Sandun	savanda mal piridiya kastun	kapurū
	Mundun	viyan tirasa javani sesat	sapirū
	Yodun	ganan miri danduväṭa pandam	vidurū
	Utun	dēvaratna Nāta surapura	kumarū
9.	Pāta	Kälanipura Lakdiva bhārava siṭage	na
	Būta	yakun haṭa gini kiyā vadāra	na
	Āta	kapaṭa budu vennaṭa vivarana ärage	na
	Nāta	dēva Ratnatilaka Surapurayen e	na
10.	Mulu	lova lakdiva sämatäna balā vadāra	ti
	Bälu	divās karunākara budubava sihive	ti
	Alu	kara ana vina jana pota mal väsi vasa	ti
	Dalu	mura mal sandun suvanda deviduta pudade	ti
11.	Ganḍa	vajrākuṭa prabhā kalasaki has	tē
	Denḍa	abhaya Lakdiva sämatäna räkagat	tē
	Yanḍa	napuru yakunta panivida univat	tē
	Enḍa	memal yahanata ada sarasā nit	tē
12.	Pätun	balā pera budu bava patā Tusita bhavane säpa vindi	nē
	Gosin	Tusita purē devindu karunā kara siṭa diväs balan	nē
	Satun	sämata van uvaduru napuru yakun pisasun duralan	nē
	Utun	memal asna balā dun dalumura devi divas balan	nē
13.	Purana	edasa perun balen gosin Tusita bavane väda un	nē
	Derana	sataṭa van uvaduru siyalu roga jana pata duralan	nē
	Derana	emihitala yakunta tedin eginijāl mavā pān	nē
	Suranara	häma apa niti räka karunā kara mal yahana vadin	nē

14.	Amapura	diva pin särä gena säpa vinda suralova min väda	nē
	Yama	pirivara rägena samaga diväs balā karunā karamin	nē
	Säma	siyalu yak pirivara matana kera teda paturavamin	nē
	Säma	uvaduru piri pota ära diväs balā mal yahana vaḍin	nē
15.	Sandun	samaga kapuru kokun bādura pinidiya gena sarasan	nē
	Mundun	viyan tira javanika sēsat sudu saḷu vaṭaṭs salan	nē
	Bätin	sirasa namā obaṭa vändemi varadaṭa kamā karan	nē
	Medun	panduru bulat yahan diväs balā sänekin vaḍimin	nē
16.	Pāta	Kälanipura bārava sita ge	na
	Bīta	yakun pudaräs karavā ge	na
	Āta	diväs lā pera manlā ge	na
	Nāta	surindu Senkaḍagala pura e	na
17.	Däkalā	sata sita pubudu keren	dā
	Vevlā	duṭa säka bīta vemin	dā
	Ekalā	jayakoḍi minimutu ban	dā
	Väḍala	surasen Nāta surin	dā
18.	Diväs	balā väjabena surindun	nē
	Satos	velā Dumburaṭa vaḍin	nē
	Ahas	kusin ena valā gäbin	nē
	Melas	sänen bala teda pān	nē
19.	Melesin	väḍa siṭa āḍḍa karage	na
	Pasu in	Senkadagal pura päminu	na
	Sobaman	kal gevamin pasu giya tä	na
	Ena sen	Dumbara eliyaṭa pämine	na
20.	Dota	mudun tabamin pavasan	nē
	Āta	mäta sen balā sitin	nē
	Bīta	karana soli kavuru visin	nē
	Pāta	me Dumbara bārava in	nē
21.	Asā	ebas ros mäda esurin	dā
	Tisā	epura yuda senagat kän	dā

	Bäsā	yenena gamanaki sarosin	dā
	Yasā	yudaya karaviya ohu kän	dā
22.	Bädda	mädata vī yudaya karan	nē
	Sadda	gosaki sen yuda bäta den	nē
	Ädda	mema teda bala devu duṇ	nē
	Yudda	karan pera munaṭa vandin	nē
23.	Däkalā	teda bala Piṭiyē devin	dā
	Mekalā	sen biya patvana sin	dā
	Balalā	vaṭa piṭa upamā bän	dā
	Ekalā	jayakodi keheliya bän	dā
24.	Hita	miturukam noma karamin	nē
	Gāta	bindala gena sivpāvun	nē
	Bīta	karana sen perata gasan	nē
	Nāta	surindu udayen päradin	nē
25.	Savsata	sasarin mudā harinṭa	t
	Lovturu	budu bavva labā patanṭa	t
	Pavbiya	bäriviya yudda karanṭa	t
	Savsata	galavā āpasu yanṭa	t
26.	Yanamen	Pasgama kanda sobāva	ṭa
	Disran	nagimin vimanin sahato	ṭa
	Ganaran	vidayi kin salasā si	ṭa
	Mawaran	vimanki Nātaya surindu	ṭa

6

The Power of Place: Oral Traditions at Rural Kandyan Nātha *Dēvālayas*

The myth of Nātha's defeat at the hands of Piṭiye is the most frequently told story about Nātha Dēviyō in the Kandyan cultural area. At each of the Nātha *dēvālayas* except Vegiriya, the story is repeated today with much enthusiasm and in great detail. In fact, the myth functions as a "charter," in the Malinowskian sense, for both the Pasgama and the Kandy Nātha *dēvālayas*. Congregants at both allude to it as the reason why Nātha took up permanent residence at these shrines. There are, however, other local village legends about Nātha that betray a continuing ambivalence between his *lōkōttara* significance as a bodhisattva and his *laukika* powers as a contemporary village deity. In these other oral traditions, Nātha's power is expressed in the idioms of village folklore and religion. While his "defeat" is well known, it has not impaired the manner in which his power has been conflated with village interests. In some ways, it has abetted it. Excepting of the Buddha, Nātha resides at the apex of the sacral hierarchy in village religion. As such, he is something of a supernatural headman. In this chapter, I will discuss the religious significance of these local oral traditions, especially the manner in which Nātha has come to stand for principles of purity, order, and village power (as opposed to royal power) from the village point of view. That is, I will illustrate how Nātha's power was conflated with divine powers of a more local order. In addition, I am departing from the diachronic approach that has served the central argument well so far. Here and in Chapters 7 and 8, where I will discuss the structure and meaning of central rituals, symbols, and myths of defining importance at these rural *dēvālayas* (patterns of religious activities

that probably date back to the mideighteenth century or within a few decades of the reign of Narendra Siṃha), my concern will be more focused upon the *laukika* character of Nātha as a village deity per se. In the process, I will illustrate the diffusive manner in which Nātha was assimilated into popular village religion. The shift in focus, therefore, is not only from the elite religion of the court and capital to the strains of popular religious culture in peripheral villages but also from a diachronic to a synchronic analysis.

In the rural Kandyan villages where surviving Nātha *dēvālaya*s are located, the cult of Nātha occupies great prominence in local religious practice. Here Nātha is not only identified as Maitrī, the next Buddha-to-be but remains an important active force in the religious lives of the local people. This socioreligious fact stands in stark contrast to his almost *otios* profile throughout the rest of Sri Lanka, where he is, for the most part, a forgotten or a distant deity on the verge of buddhahood. In these village contexts, his active *laukika* presence seems to contradict the basic theme of the *Nātha Deviyange*. . . .

As autonomous institutions operating independently from monastic Buddhist *vihāraya*s, the Nātha *dēvālaya*s at Pasgama, Vegiriya, Hunapahura, and Dodanvela are not only sources of great village pride but are regarded with very high degrees of sanctity and respect. As we shall see in Chapter 7, the calendrical ritual traditions still practiced at these *dēvālaya*s date back to the times of the Nāyakkar kings. The mythic traditions that we will examine toward the end of this chapter may have originated even earlier. Before addressing these oral traditions, the traditional socioreligious administrative structure of the *dēvālaya*s will be discussed for, in doing so, we shall discover some of the basic principles articulated in myth.

Pasgama, Vegiriya, and Dodanvela are remote, traditional rice-growing villages located some distance away from the main trunk highways leading into Kandy in the up-country region of Sri Lanka. But Hunapahura is located far to the northwest of modern Matale and beyond the pale of the Kandy district per se. To some extent, Hunapahura's location was beyond the centralizing influence of the dominant ritual patterns at the old capital discussed in Chapter 7 (the significance of religious practices at Hunapahura will be discussed in Chapter 8).

Before motorized transportation, Pasgama, Vegirya, and Dodanvela were at least one day's travel from Kandy by foot or bullock cart. While Sri Lanka is rapidly modernizing, many facets of life in these villages are not very different from the general descriptions of agrarian existence offered by Davy [1983] in the early nineteenth century or even by Knox [1984] in the midseventeenth. Culturally, this is also the case. Although each of these villages can be reached from Kandy in an hour or so by bus, almost all of the villagers work locally in the fields, growing rice for their livelihoods.

Changes in agricultural husbandry are in evidence, such as the (over)use of pesticides and fertilizers, but rice is still largely planted and harvested by hand, and domesticated water buffaloes still trample the rice stalks to separate the husks for drying. The rice fields are also tilled by the buffalo pulling a hand plow and are prepared for sowing by hoe to the sounds of traditional songs. The rhythms of traditional agrarian life are still very much present. Although my descriptions in this chapter and the next are largely drawn from contemporary observations, they reflect much of the nature of life at the *dēvālaya*s as it has been unfolding for many centuries.

The economy of these villages has changed little over the years. While some youth leave the village for salaried positions in Colombo or Kandy, those with access to adequate resources of land are more willing to work for themselves for less pay than to work for someone else to receive a little more. Per capita income is difficult to measure in these villages as goods and services are often exchanged rather than purchased by cash. Basic foodstuffs (rice, spices, vegetables, and coconuts) are usually homegrown. Land is usually passed on through inheritance or dowry. Local shops carry only a few essential items such as soap, oil, kerosene, dhal, bread, and tea. Most modern luxury items can only be bought in town, for a very steep price from the villagers' perspectives. Socially, the climate is conservative.

As in the era of the late medieval Kandyan kings, the *dēvālaya*s play an important socioeconomic role in these rural villages. Each of these *dēvālaya*s was originally endowed with extensive land grants by various medieval kings, and much of the same land remains the property of the *dēvālaya*s today. *Sannasa*s (official proclamations) at Pasgama and Vegiriya date these royal grants to the Gampola era, while the Dodanvela *Dēvālaya* is traditionally dated to the seventeenth-century reign of Rājasiṃha II. In late medieval times, none of the lands granted for the endowment of the *dēvālaya*s was subject to taxation. A percentage of produce derived from them was, and still is, used to finance and maintain the physical premises of the *dēvālaya*s and its various ritual activities. In many instances, ritual services, rather than a percentage of produce, have been required of those tilling *dēvālaya* land. Even if *dēvālaya* land is sold off, the new buyer is still obliged to honor *rājakāriyā* ("royal service"). That is, whoever owns the land is required to provide at least a continuing ritual service to the *dēvālaya*.

The Administrative Structures of Nātha *Dēvālaya*s

Each *dēvālaya* is administered by a *basnāyaka nilamē*, or a lay custodian. In traditional Kandyan times, the *basnāyaka nilamē*s were always high-caste

aristocratic landowners appointed by the king to oversee the financial interests of the *dēvālaya*. Sometimes they held these ecclesiastical appointments concomitantly with other positions of high civil administration. In theory, the position of *basnāyaka nilamē* was not meant to be lucrative. (Yet, in fact, it can be used to establish effective control over the production of food on vast amounts of land.) Rather, the position of the *basnāyaka nilamē* was, and remains, primarily one of prestige, indicating a very high social and political rank. To become a *basnāyaka nilamē* was the result of royal award.

To understand the position of the *basnāyaka nilamē* within the social and political world of the traditional Kandyan kingdom, it is necessary to note the basic political structure of authority within the king's administration and how its system of hierarchy corresponded to the structure of the divine pantheon as comprehended by village people. According to Davy, the king was served first by two *adigar*s, whose positions were somewhat similar to that of a prime minister. They represented the king's interests to 12 *disāva*s ("governors" or "chiefs") who administered the 12 districts beyond the boundaries of the central Kandyan district. The central Kandyan district proper was subdivided into seven (sometimes nine) administrative subunits (*rața*) whose jurisdictions came under the power of *rațēmahātmya*s (literally: "country gentlemen," but more accurately "regional lords"). With the exception of 2, all of the 12 outlying districts (*disāvanaya*s) were situated laterally to the up-country central capital district, while the intra-Kandy district *rața*s were located centrically, immediately and contiguously surrounding the capital city of Kandy itself. The geopolitical configuration of the Kandyan kingdom, then, resembled an imprecise *maṇḍala*. All of these high-level administrators who were responsible for the various districts and *rațas* reported directly to the king or indirectly through his *adigar*s. All land and authority in the kingdom were vested ultimately in the king. Taxes or services were demanded from all properties in the kingdom. *Rațēmahātmaya*s and *disāva*s were respectively charged with overseeing the king's interests and adjudicating justice within their realms. Thus, they were the king's noble middlemen.

In this administrative scheme, *basnāyaka nilamē*s were charged with responsibility for those lands and villages that the king, for religious reasons in principle, had granted outright to *dēvālaya*s and that therefore remained beyond the purview of the *disāva*s and the *rațēmahātmaya*s. Sometimes these lands were considerable. At one point, the Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy was known to have been granted more than 10,000 acres of paddy land alone. *Basnāyaka nilamē*s held positions of prestige equal in social and political rank to the *disāva*s and *rațēmahātmaya*s, although obviously their responsibilities were much lighter [Davy, 102–1, 112]. Frequently, they were state officials serving in other important government capacities under the king. Their pres-

ence, therefore, had the effect of diversifying administrative rule. This high social and political ranking was, and still is, symbolically expressed in the ritual processions of the annual Kandy Äsaḷa Perahära pageant, where, as we shall see in Chapter 7, the relative status of social and divine hierarchies are expressed symbolically in public ritual procession. *Basnāyaka nilamē*s were thus high-profile temporal rulers of *dēvālaya* domains by virtue not only of their administrative rank but because of their noticeable presence at important ritual proceedings.

Today, the position of *basnāyaka nilamē*s remains very socially prestigious and politically significant in rural up-country Sri Lanka. *Basnāyaka nilamē*s are now elected by a special electoral college consisting of 26 members: 13 Assistant Government Agents and 13 *basnāyaka nilamē*s (from selected important *dēvālaya*s) within the Kandyan district. Only *basnāyaka nilamē*s have the prerogative of nomination to their positions. It is a closed process; AGAs simply have the right to vote positively or negatively on these nominations. Normally, the term of a *basnāyaka nilamē* runs for a five-year duration, but they are frequently renewed depending upon the political party or coalition of political parties in control of the current central government. Without fail, *basnāyaka nilamē*s are either wealthy businessmen or lawyers from either Kandy or Gampola whose lineage has been traced to *radala* (high-caste) status in the old Kandyan kingdom. Many of these are aspiring politicians who may already hold important positions in local government. Their participation in the processions of the annual Kandy Äsaḷa Perahära and their high profiles during the annual village *dēvālaya perahära*s give them the type of public visibility advantageous and necessary for a successful political career. As the composition of the Assistant Government Agents within the electoral college is very likely to shift with a change in the political party controlling the central government of Sri Lanka, the position of *basnāyaka nilamē* is liable to become a "plum" for that party's up-country political aspirants. I will discuss the traditional cosmopolitical significance of the *perahära*s in Chapter 7; for now it is enough to indicate that the position of the *basnāyaka nilamē* is endowed by "charisma of the office" and legitimates its holder as one whose interests can be identified as traditionally Sinhala Buddhist.

In the three Kandyan villages where Nātha *dēvālaya*s are found, the *basnāyaka nilamē* is well respected and recognized as a man of considerable wealth and power. In addition to administering lands owned by the *dēvālaya* and organizing the annual village *dēvālaya perahära* and other calendrical rituals, the *basnāyaka nilamē* is responsible for insuring that *rājakāriya* services owed to the *dēvālaya* continue to be "honored." Three or four times a year, he holds village meetings to stress the importance of continuing to

perform *rājakāriya*. Here the pride of past kingship and Sinhala Buddhist identity are assumed, championed, and reinforced. *Rājakāriya* is presented in terms of duty to one's tradition but, in fact, it is also a form of rent that is sometimes difficult to collect. As in Kandyan times, a local villager assists the *basnāyaka nilamē* as a "sergeant at arms" to insure that routine duties are met and to report any lapses in responsibility. Perhaps because of his role as a landlord and quasi disciplinarian, and perhaps because he is an outsider to the villagers who has been appointed "from above," the *basnāyaka nilamē* evokes a slight undercurrent of antipathy among villagers. Such antipathy is expressed whenever villagers speak of some of the traditional *rājakāriya* duties no longer in force. Most of these duties are purely medieval and pertain to attending to the personal needs of the *basnāyaka nilamē* whenever he visited the village: digging a fresh latrine for his use, providing water in specially cleaned pitchers and jars, providing expensive linen, etc. Each of the *dēvālaya kapurāla*s now stress that it becomes increasingly difficult to persuade village youth to carry on many *rājakāriya* traditions of old, especially those of ritual significance. Some youth may give a small monetary donation to the *dēvālaya* at festive occasions, but many do not want to be involved in activities that they find to be "useless" or demeaning. There is also the feeling expressed consistently among villagers that farming *dēvālaya* land on a rental basis is not particularly profitable. (One villager who I had come to know quite well told me that the rice harvested from *dēvālaya* lands always seems to disappear "mysteriously" and lasted only for a fraction of the time as rice grown on his own property.) Finally, perhaps because the regal presence of the *basnāyaka nilamē* is a reminder of their own poverty and relative powerlessness, it is not surprising for some antipathy to be felt among villagers. On the whole, however, relations between the *basnāyaka nilamē* and villagers in all three contexts were quite open, straightforward, and governed by mutual courtesies.

Services owed to the *dēvālaya* by villagers are categorized according to principles of purity and pollution, and these principles, in turn, are consistently expressed in myths and legends regarding the purity and sanctity of the *dēvālaya*s. At Pasgama, for instance, *rājakāriya* responsibilities to the *dēvālaya* traditionally devolve upon 24 village families who are divided into two groups of 12: an "inner group" and an "outer group." The "inner group" are all members of the *govigama* caste (the traditional, landowning farming caste that constitutes about 60 percent of all Sinhalese and is generally regarded as the "highest" caste). Their tasks are to care for the *inside* of the *dēvālaya:* keeping the sanctum in good repair, providing and cleaning the linen used in festivals and rites, cleaning the "weapons" and insignia of the deity, etc. The *kapurāla,* of course, is of *govigama* status. At Dodanvela, only

those from the *radala,*[1] or highest subcaste of the *govigama,* are given responsibilities for decorating the interior of the *dēvālaya,* providing cloth for the *perahära* elephants and a "Kandyan hat" for the *basnāyaka nilamē* [Lawrie, 1898, vol. 1: 175–76]. Those who belong to "outer groups" responsible for *rājakāriya* duties are of low-caste origins and perform the kinds of services that take place *outside* the *dēvālaya*'s anteroom and sanctum sanctorum: cleaning and sweeping the *dēvālaya* grounds, blacksmithing, washing linens, and drumming. Some of these services may be "commuted" by means of a cash payment, but caste status based upon an awareness of the principles of purity and pollution always determines the nature of service to be provided. *Rājakāriya* service to the *dēvālaya,* qualified by the principles of purity and pollution undergirding caste conceptions, at once unites a community in common service to the *dēvālaya* and maintains the structures of hierarchy intrinsic to traditional Kandyan Sinhala social order.

Myths of Purity and Pollution at Village Nātha *Dēvālayas*

I collected two types of myths at the village Nātha *dēvālayas*. The first consists of stories of origins (for which I have chosen the Sanskrit term *sthalapurāṇa* to designate) pertaining to the establishment of the respective *dēvālayas*. The myth of Nātha's confrontation with Piṭiye is told as a chartering story at Pasgama with some slight embellishments at its conclusion to indicate that when Nātha fled Dumbara and found the village of Pasgama to be receptive, he built a *dēvālaya* there out of his appreciation for the hospitality shown by the local villagers. The "*sthalapurāṇas*" of Vegiriya, Hunapahura, and Dodanvela will be discussed later in this chapter; the significance of the second type of myth, those that illustrate the primary importance attached to conventions of purity and pollution, are now the immediate focus. These latter stories, along with some events personally witnessed during fieldwork, provide helpful insights into the nature of religious conceptions of power and belief at the rural, popular level. Here Nātha's power to act in *laukika* fashion is based upon his perceived purity. The fact that all of the following stories were told by villagers who must perform *rājakāriya* duties reflects their functional use. Like "fire-and-brimstone" sermons and substantively akin to the abominations of Leviticus, they are folkloric reminders of the dangers awaiting anyone who contravenes fundamental principles of acceptable behavior within the context of their duties performed at the *dēvālaya.* Thus, both the efficacy of the *dēvālaya*'s sacred power and the principles of social hierarchy are based on perceptions of purity and pollution.

In traditional Sinhala culture, death is regarded as the greatest pollutant. It

transcends the inherent levels of purity and pollution attached to caste status. If a death has occurred in the *kapurāla*'s immediate family (in his house), he is suspended from performing ritual activities at the *dēvālaya* for at least 3 months. The *kapurāla*'s purity is always of utmost concern for, as the chief ritual specialist and intermediary between the villagers' needs and Nātha's power, he is indispensable. But the precept of 3 months' suspension owing to death within the family also holds for all villagers with respect to performing *rājakāriya* duties.

An interesting example of the power of pollution associated with death occurred during my fieldwork at the Vegiriya Nātha *dēvālaya* in 1984 when the father of the presiding *basnāyaka nilamē* had died about 1 week before the scheduled beginning of the the annual *dēvālaya perahära*. When I arrived for the opening night of the *perahära* festivities, I discovered a *bhikkhu* chanting *pirit*[2] under a hastily constructed *maṇḍapa* (ritual porch made out of various shoots and leaves) in the *diggē* (the drumming room or porch abutting the *dēvālaya* anteroom). I was politely informed that the *perahära* had been postponed for 2 weeks. In other words, because the *basnāyaka nilamē* was in a state of pollution, the *perahära* could not proceed as usual. A death in the *kapurāla*'s family would have resulted in an even greater delay. But since the *basnāyaka nilamē* is an "outsider" to the village and not as directly involved with the performance of ritual, the period of delay was shortened. When the festivities finally got under way 2 weeks later, they were considerably subdued by the usual standards. In previous years, five elephants and a large company of musicians had participated in the colorful nightly processions. But during the 1984 *perahära,* only one elephant was hired and *kāvaḍi* dancers[3] of the Kataragama cult had to make due with the faint sounds of music coming from a small portable tape recorder. During the 5 nights of the *rāṇḍoli*[4] *perahära,* the *basnāyaka nilamē* kept a studied distance from the *dēvālaya,* never once approaching or entering the *diggē,* the anteroom, or the sanctum sanctorum. In addition, the *kapurāla* wore a handkerchief over his mouth and nose whenever in the *basnāyaka nilamē*'s presence.

Another exemplary occurrence (this one taking place at the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya*) further illustrates the polluting character of death. During the spring of 1984, a distraught young man suffering from unrequited love committed suicide within the sacred precincts of the *dēvālaya.* All activities at the *dēvālaya* were suspended (at great cost) for a period of 7 days. The *dēvālaya* closed entirely. The extended period of purification had to be observed before any rituals could be resumed. That week, the neighboring Mahā (Viṣṇu) *dēvālaya* prospered more than normally.

Both of these events involved death's impact upon ritual proceedings and indicate the high degree to which death is viewed as a polluting presence. The

several stories that follow dramatically further underscore the polluting effects of death as understood in contemporary Sinhala Buddhist culture.

The former *kapurāla* of the Vegiriya *dēvālaya,* a 76-year-old man who had served as the *dēvālaya*'s chief ritual specialist for 50 years, recounts how the *halamba* (bangle) of Nātha Dēviyō came into ritual disuse and had to be circumscribed due to its powerful reaction to death's pollution. As he told the story:

> During the time of Parākramabāhu of Kotte, the *halamba* was considered to be the most powerful source of danger in the village area. If anyone tried to take the *halamba* into their hands, they would contract terrible burns. People who had recently attended funerals could not come near the *dēvālaya.* If they did, they would catch serious diseases and fevers and some would die as a result. After many deaths, the people decided to get rid of the *halamba.* Using a branch of the Nā tree, they pushed the *halamba* far back into the cave into which the current *dēvālaya* is now built and sealed it off. The wall which they built is the back wall of the sanctum sanctorum now containing the images of Nātha Dēviyō and his queen, Biso Baṇḍāra. Since that time, only the *diggē,* the anteroom, and the shrine room [sanctum sanctorum] are off limits to those who have attended funerals within the past 3 months [brackets mine].

This story is actually, in part, a *sthalapurāṇa.* But we quote it here because of its obvious connection to the perceived polluting effects of death. It also includes a telling reference to the Nā tree, the significance of which we shall also see shortly.

Another story, this one from Pasgama, further illustrates the polluting effects of death and the potential dangers associated with it. This story was told by the *dēvālaya kapurāla:*

> A Buddhist monk from a nearby village came directly to the *dēvālaya* after he had preached a sermon at a funeral. He had come to the *dēvālaya* in order to make a vow to Nātha. Coming out of the anteroom, he encountered a cobra poised for attack. Startled, he slipped and fell down the steps leading up to the *dēvālaya.* Although his injury amounted only to a small cut on his finger, it gradually worsened and eventually the monk died.

Thus, in traditional Sinhala culture, death is viewed as a serious interruption of the rhythms of life, causing potential peril to the deceased's closest kin and to public domains of purity. Obligatory ritual acts must be observed by family members in order to insure a smooth transition through the extended period of mourning and pollution. The spouse and children of the deceased must wear white clothes for a period of 3 months. Generally, food is not cooked within the house of the deceased for a period of 7 days (food is usually provided by neighbors or kin who have arrived to comfort the bereaved). Alms

are given to Buddhist monks, and *pirit* is chanted on the 7th day following the death, after 3 months, and after 1 year. The merit generated from these rites is transferred to the departed with the hope that it will improve his or her lot in the afterlife. These actions are undertaken to counteract the potential malevolent effects of death and represent symbolic attempts to restore familial order in the face of liminality. That is, they attempt to restore the balance of life by securing a definite place for the deceased in the "other world." If these actions are not undertaken, the deceased, as a lingering force of malfeasance, may wreak havoc on the living because he has not been properly "situated" or "put to rest." Death's pollution is viewed as contagious. Therefore, by observing social and ritual prescriptions, its polluting contagion can be confined.

Both of the stories recounted above are illustrations of what can happen if these prescriptions are transgressed. If someone is in a state of pollution and contaminates the purity of a sacred place, an unbridled and therefore destructive power is unleashed. Both the power of the *halamba* and the power of the *nāga* (cobra) are defensive in nature and symbolically function as preservers of *dēvālaya* purity. By violating rules of purity that keep pollution in its place, the powers that they symbolize are no longer circumscribed.

After both of the above stories had been told, I asked the *kapurāla*s if Nātha Dēviyō's power was responsible for the resulting deaths. In both cases, I was told emphatically that Nātha was not directly responsible, but that retinues of Yāma (the god of death) inflict punishment on anyone who pollutes the purity of the *dēvālaya* and the god. In fact, the communal concern here is that polluting the purity of *dēvālaya* ruins the potentially positive power that can be tapped by devotees. Herein we gain a glimpse of Nātha's village virtue. Regarded as the future Maitrī, he stands for the ultimate soteriological destiny of all living beings. He is categorically in opposition to death. Purity is equated with life. Nātha's virtue continues to be his purity. As such, he is regarded as a positive life-giving power.

Other life "passages" are also associated with pollution. Similar stories are told about the polluting effects of childbirth and puberty. As with deaths, *kapurāla*s are temporarily proscribed from performing *dēvālaya* rites if either of these events occurs in their households. Among these rites is the offering of *murutan,* the meal of rice and curry especially prepared and offered to Nātha on *kemmara* days. At Vegiriya, there is a special *murutan kapurāla* of *govigama* status who prepares the food in a special kitchen located within the sacred precincts of the *dēvālaya.* The food cooked for *murutan* is grown on *dēvālaya* land and then stored in buildings owned by the *dēvālaya.* Indeed, the practice of *murutan* (ritually feeding the gods) is one of the rationales for endowing the *dēvālaya* with lands. At Dodanvela and Pasgama, the responsi-

bility of providing meals for Nātha is shared by various families in the respective villages who look upon the practice as similar to almsgivings for monks; that is, it is an act of *pin* (merit making) that will bring reward. It reflects a relationship of exchange between Nātha and his village. One story from Pasgama illustrates the importance of purity in connection with *murutan:*

> A family responsible for the *murutan* offering brought rice and curry to the *dēvālaya* only 2 days after a childbirth in their home. After preparing the food and covering it with a sheath, they proceeded to the *dēvālaya* to make the offering. When they reached the anteroom to present the food to the *kapurāla,* they uncovered the sheath and were startled to find a *nāga* [cobra] coiled up on top of the rice.

As in the previous story about the polluted monk who encountered a cobra at the *dēvālaya* after having attended a funeral, it is clear that the cobra is a guardian of the *dēvālaya*'s purity. The *nāga*'s function as a guard is also clear by virtue of the fact that it is a favorite sculptural motif in every guard stone entrance to buildings at Sinhala Buddhist religious sites. The function of protection is not the only attribute ascribed to *nāga*s. They are also symbols of fertility. While childbirth and puberty are also indicative of fertility, these are also regarded as occasions of impurity (essentially defined as "matter out of place"). Childbirth and puberty are also periods of transition and therefore vulnerability. The *nāga* is a symbol of fertility *and* purity, hence its association with sacral power. The purity that the *nāga*s defend is what preserves the power of Nātha to help establish productive order in the lives of villagers. While the *dēvālaya,* as we shall see, represents a source of power to restore order in the lives of villagers, devotees must always be in a state of purity before they can enter the sacred place and approach Nātha. If a devotee approaches the *dēvālaya* in a state of pollution owing to death, childbirth, or puberty, the power of the *dēvālaya* is unleashed in a destructive rather than a constructive fashion. Thus, while divine assistance is sought before death occurs, or before childbirth, devotees and their families keep their distance from the *dēvālaya* during and immediately after these types of events. The underlying reason for this is that order and sacrality are dependent upon purity in traditional Sinhala culture. As death, childbirth, and menstruation are the epitomes of liminality and are equated with instability, impurity, and vulnerability, they threaten the purity of Nātha upon which his *laukika* power is based. Moreover, appearing before Nātha in a polluted state also indicates a great lack of respect, or an unpardonable degree of ignorance.

Several more stories, too many to relate here, illustrate the high degree of importance attached to the maintenance of purity at village Nātha *dēvālaya*s. Many of them are of the same genre that I have just reported, but others

emphasize how purity was *willfully* violated. Each demonstrates how the power of the *dēvālaya* was unleashed against unmitigated expressions of arrogance.

> A villager from Dodanvela owing *rājakāriya* and his Muslim friend were constructing a drain along one of the walls of the *dēvālaya*. After lunch, the Muslim went to relieve himself and decided to see if the newly constructed drain would work properly. Warned by his friend about the impropriety of his action, the Muslim proceeded to urinate against the *dēvālaya* wall. Immediately, he fell to his knees, began to cough up blood, and died a short time later.

On another occasion at Dodanvela,

> a villager, whose *rājakāriya* was to assist the *kapurāla* in carrying the *ran āyudha* ["golden weapon"] during the annual *dēvālaya perahära*, was having a conversation with the *kapurāla* in the sanctum sanctorum. He remarked that the eyes of Nātha looked crossed. Upon his departure from the sanctum sanctorum, he eyes began to burn and soon he became blind.

A similar story:

> A villager, whose *rājakāriya* was to carry the *dēvālaya* flag during the *perahära*, came to the *dēvālaya* one day and used the consecrated water obtained in the "water-cutting" ceremony to wash his back. Soon his back began to itch and burn. He ran out screaming for relief into the adjacent paddy field. The *kapurāla* was summoned to make an entreaty to the god. While the pain subsequently went away, that man bore the scars of his impropriety for the rest of his life.

Another story from Vegiriya is similar to those above:

> A young villager, whose *rājakāriya* service consisted of cleaning the ritual utensils used in offering *murutan*, drank water from one of the vessels reserved for the offering. The vessel became hot and stuck to his lips. The *kapurāla* immediately pleaded to Nātha for relief and the vessel cooled and became unstuck.

While these stories are all told about those who hold *rājakāriya* service, the following tale from Dodanvela relates how the Portuguese once tried to break into the *dēvālaya* and destroy the images within. It forms the concluding segment of the Dodanvela "*sthalapurāṇa*":

> As the Portuguese approached the *dēvālaya*, they were attacked by swarming clouds of wasps. Retreating, they took branches from the grove of Nā trees in an attempt to ward the bees off. But, as a result of their contact with the sacred tree, they broke out into rashes and quickly fled. Thus, the *dēvālaya*'s purity was spared.

The same basic story is told at Hunapahura about a king of Kandy, covetous of the image of Nātha contained within the *dēvālaya* (see the image carved out of wood from the Nā tree in Plates 27 and 28), who sent soldiers to attempt to remove it. The soldiers were driven from the compound by swarms of wasps.

These are some of the tales that were often recited during my fieldwork in the Kandyan villages where Nātha *dēvālaya*s are located. These kinds of stories are actually told with much greater frequency than stories about how Nātha has helped "his" people. What they illustrate primarily are the principles of purity and pollution that demarcate the sacred from the profane, in Durkheim's and Douglas's use of the terms. That is, these stories articulate prescriptions and prohibitions regarding the nature of behavior within circumscribed sacred areas. They are the same principles of observance operative in caste considerations, that is, they illustrate what exactly a given person in a given condition can touch or handle. Violation of these principles, it is clear, leads to the eruption of uncontrolled and destructive power.

What is also apparent is the consistent reference to the qualities of hot and cool and how these are associated with purity and pollution. In South Asian culture in general, particularly in Dravidian south India, heat is often equated with disastrous outbreaks of power. It is possible that this was originally due to the fact that the hot season is an unhealthy time and generally the period of the year in which various fevers and epidemic diseases spread. In his study of village religion in Madhya Pradesh, Lawrence Babb [1975] has shown how Śītalā, the goddess of smallpox, expresses her displeasure at violations of ritual purity through the spread of this dreaded disease. She is also, concomitantly, the "cool" one who can curtail its spread when mollified [Babb, 1975]. The same principle is also expressed in the central myth about the goddess Pattinī, whose righteous indignation leads to a violent outburst of power resulting in the burning of the city of Madurai [Obeyesekere, 1984: 511–29, 603–6]. *Heat is power*. It is clear from as early as the *Ṛg Veda* that asceticism generates heat as a purified power. But heat becomes destructive unless it is controlled. On the level of religious lore, this means that in Madhya Pradesh, Śītalā must be kept "cool" through ritual invocations, or that Pattinī must be mollified or vindicated before ordered power is achieved. In each of these instances, heat is power, but if it is not kept "in its place" or balanced with "cool," it leads to destructive ends. In the Sinhala context, violations of purity or contraventions of ritually prescribed order lead to outbursts of heat with the same damaging destructive force.

With regard to the significance of these tales for my central argument, it is clear that Nātha's *laukika* power is maintained only by the observance of strict rules of purity. In the introduction, I pointed out how important this is for recognizing the religious significance, or the sacrality, of divine *laukika*

power. In the village cults of Nātha, this-worldly help is sought to assuage the experience of *dukkha* ("unsatisfactoriness" or "suffering"), but it can only be tapped by first observing rules of purity.

Nātha's *Laukika* Assistance

Here, it is significant to note that one of the *laukika* powers consistently ascribed to Nātha is the power to heal those afflicted by fevers and skin rashes. It is possible that this perceived ability might be traced back to the Indian Mahāyāna heritage of Avalokiteśvara. As a savior from the "eight great perils" in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (*Lotus Sūtra*), one of Avalokiteśvara's specific powers was to cure diseases. This motif seems to have continued in popular Sinhala folklore not only at village Nātha *dēvālaya*s where coconuts are brought to be "charged" with Nātha's power before being used for medicinal purposes, but also in the famous legend of Kuṣṭharājagala (Chapter 3, n. 2, and Plate 8) in Weligama on the southwestern coast of the island. Although the rock-cut image at this site is obviously one of a bodhisattva, possibly Avalokiteśvara, local inhabitants claim that it is a likeness of Kuṣṭharāja, a foreign king who came to Sri Lanka with a serious skin disease that was finally cured by a steady diet of coconut milk. (In Sinhala cuisine, coconut milk is regarded as a "cool" substance complementing the "heat" of spices used in the cooking of curries. Its use to counter the outbreak of rashes illustrates its cooling powers.) There is also the medieval rite still practiced at the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya,* where medicinal plants are consecrated by Nātha's *kapurāla*s before being distributed to temples throughout the area.

While most local stories serve to reinforce the sanctity of the *dēvālaya*s and function as reminders of purity and pollution to villagers of the power residing therein, the power of the gods, especially Nātha, is primarily constructive in nature. Repeatedly, villagers and *kapurāla*s stressed that Nātha does nothing but good. *Paḷigannavā* (practicing ritual revenge; sorcery) is never directly linked to him. Acts of sorcery in the villages of my fieldwork were reserved primarily for those trafficking with the *baṇḍāra* god Däḍimunda. However, while villagers consistently stress the goodness of Nātha, and in a number of cases note Nātha's "high-caste status," he is not, I found, totally removed from the scenario of sorcery.

At Pasgama, a Däḍimunda *Dēvālaya* is located directly to the rear of Nātha's own shrine. Typically, a villager seeking Däḍimunda's mischievous or revenging assistance will first visit the nearby *vihāraya* and pay homage to the Buddha, an act of merit making. Leaving the *vihāraya* compound, he immediately proceeds to the Natha *dēvālaya,* where he seeks Nātha's permission to

approach Däḍimunda. Having secured this permission, he then approaches the *kapurāla* of the Däḍimunda *Dēvālaya,* explains his problem, and requests an appropriate *yātikāva.* In these transactions, the merit accrued through venerating the Buddha is ultimately transferred to Däḍimunda to give him more power to achieve whatever has been requested by the client.

The hierarchy of the supernatural pantheon is clearly revealed in this processual ritual routine. First, the Buddha is acknowledged as the supreme power of the cosmos. Then, Nātha, under whose power the village is protected, is approached. In the brief *yātikāva* to Nātha, no mention is made of the specific malevolent request that will be made to Däḍimunda. After the usual adulations, only the desire to approach Däḍimunda with a warrant or permission from Nātha is mentioned. What the petitioner receives from Nātha is an "introduction from a higher-up." Nātha "knows nothing" of Däḍimunda's potential nefarious activities, or, if he does, he is simply not involved. While it would seem that Nātha is indirectly implicated in sorcerous conspiracies, such a judgment just does not occur in the minds of Sinhala villagers. Nātha has simply provided a "chit."

Now, the hierarchy apparent in the above scenario is, in general, a reflexive construction of the distribution of political and administrative power as expressed within the old Kandyan kingdom. In parallel fashion, the king and the Buddha are considered to occupy the highest ranks of the political and supernatural power hierarchies, respectively, followed by the *adigars* and the four national guardian deities (including Nātha), and beneath them the *disāva*s and the *baṇḍāra*-class *doḷoha* (12) gods (including Däḍimunda). In Chapter 7, we will look at this system in detail within the context of an analysis of the *perahära* rites. What needs to be pointed out now is that while Nātha is recognized as a buddha-in-the-making and thus a symbol of *lōkōttara* wisdom, he maintains this-worldly interests in the villages where his *dēvālaya*s have survived. These interests are primarily concerned with providing protection to his devotees and serving as a "higher-up" who gives permission to contact the lesser gods who remain much more active in the affairs of men. However, he is never drawn directly into connivances rooted in sorcery. He is regarded by all villagers as too "ethically oriented" and has made far too much spiritual progress toward *nibbāna* to be involved in such activities. While it is redoubtedly clear that *laukika* assistance from Viṣṇu, Saman, Kataragama, Vibhīṣana, and Pattinī is sought far more often throughout Sri Lanka, in the villages of Pasgama, Vegiriya, Hunapahura, and Dodanvela, remnants of Nātha's medieval this-worldly cult remain a primary resource for gaining positive supernatural help. As one villager explained, Nātha is the supreme help for those "who live within the shadow of his 'golden weapon.' " Here, he is a village deity who has compassion.

It is within the context of Nātha providing divine protection that the *kapurāla* plays his vital priestly role. It is his *dharmic* responsibility as well as his *rājakāriya* duty to always be "on call" to assist villagers with their needs by means of his mediating powers. Help from Nātha is generally sought in two forms. The first is preventative in nature, that is, protection is sought to ward off potential disasters. Accordingly, it is not unusual for young babies to be brought to the *dēvālaya* once they have reached the age of 3 months (after the period of pollution). During the annual *perahäras* at Vegiriya, Pasgama, and Dodanvela, numerous babies are brought by their parents and laid down at the foot of the *kapurāla* in front of the anteroom. The *kapurāla* chants blessings on them to protect them from disease. At Pasgama, an annual *murutan* is given on behalf of the entire village to ask for Nātha's protection in preventing the outbreak of rashes during the coming year. At all three *dēvālayas*, it is traditional to ask for Nātha's protection before undertaking any considerable journey.

The second type of help sought from Nātha is much more common and active, rather than preventative in nature. The Nātha *dēvālayas* at Pasgama, Vegiriya, and Dodanvela on *kemmara* days are a bit like barometers measuring the types of problems currently besetting local villagers. The most frequent petitioners are women and old men. In most cases, the type of help they seek is truly *laukika:* a request for the return of stolen coconuts or the recovery of some other lost item. But other petitions are quite serious. On various occasions, I witnessed petitions for the return of missing persons or the cure of undiagnosed illnesses. In one very emotional instance, a young wife recently deserted by her husband petitioned Nātha to "upset" her husband's mind so that he would return to his senses of duty and honor. Would Nātha intervene? On another occasion, a young mother brought her two young children to the *dēvālaya,* explaining that they had been suffering from nightmares each night. Would Nātha calm their fears? One Saturday morning, an old man arrived in despair to tell the *kapurāla* that his son had been mistakenly arrested by the police the night before. Would Nātha set the matter straight? In all of these cases, direct intervention from Nātha as a "higher-up" was requested.

For his role as an intermediary, the *kapurāla* receives a modest offering. His power rests not only on his ritual purity which is affirmed by his *pevenavā* (practicing rites of purification) preparations but also in the potency of his yātikā per se. *Kapurālas* are believed to have the power to coax the deities by flattering them. The *yātikā* do just that. All *yātikā* chants follow much the same outline. First, permission to approach the deity is asked in ingratiating language. During this initial phase, the *kapurāla* recalls the central myth connected to the deity locally. It is within these contexts that I collected the various oral versions of Nātha's confrontation with Piṭiye, but it is also within

these chants that other elements of Nathā's mythic stratigraphy become known. What the *yātikāva* does is to localize the deity's great divine power. That is, the various "*sthalapurāṇas*" are recounted within the chant, indicating how the deity came to take up residence in the *dēvālaya*. (We shall look at the significance of these shortly.) Having described Nātha's feats of divine power, the *kapurāla*, by means of recalling the "*sthalapurāṇa*" and in the process having reminded the deity of his past interventions, then says: "since you have accomplished these great feats in the past, please be kind enough to exercise your mercy now on this suffering slave." The exact nature of the petition is then made known. If the petitioner has arrived for a "general blessing" or protection, the petition to Nātha is for protection against diseases (especially rashes), prosperity in trade, and amiability among associates. At Pasgama, the *kapurāla* was fond of saying: "Just as when the sandalwood paste is applied, let the bodies and minds of these poor slaves be cooled." In all cases, the god is appealed to to prevent disorder or to restore order. At the level of the village, Nātha is clearly regarded as a "supernatural headman" and a healer of disease.

Mythic Origins of Nātha *Dēvālayas*

As I have noted, the myths recounting the central episodes of Nātha's "career" are articulated within the context of the *kapurāla*'s petitionary *yātikā*. The *kapurāla* has thus become the chief transmitter of local oral tradition. For the village devotees, his chants transmute myth into local history. That is, the "*sthalapurāṇas*" that he recalls explain how the *dēvālaya* became sanctified, or how it was discovered to be a sacred place, and how as a result of the *dēvālaya*'s hierophantic significance it remains a source of power to be tapped. What differentiates these "*sthalapurāṇas*" from Tamil or Hindu "*sthalapurāṇas*" is a matter of magnitude. Like their counterparts in the Indian Hindu context, these particular myths relate the sacred origins of the shrine; however, none of them strongly emphasizes the typically Hindu traits: (1) the imperative for all devotees to undertake pilgrimages in order to receive divine boons; with the possible exception of Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy, these sacred places are scarcely known beyond their respective village milieux; and (2) an emphasis upon sacred geography or parallel microcosm-macrocosm symbolism that associates the shrine as being a type of heavenly abode on earth. While these traits are present to a limited degree, nowhere does one hear about how pilgrimage to these sites of sacral power results in the realization of the final religious goal. That is, few pretensions to universality (or better: *lōkōttara*) are made in the local and oral traditions of these *dēvālayas*.

The "*sthalapurāṇas*" of Vegiriya, Dodanvela, and Hunapahura all share a fundamental theme: the *dēvālayas* were established by Sinhalese kings who came to recognize the great power of Nātha. In fact, in each of these three stories, we hear local assertions about how the power of the Nātha Dēviyō was deemed superior to that of a king and, further, how that "fact" had to be royally recognized in order for the king to be successful in his ventures. These recognitions, of course, lend legitimacy to the dēvālayas as hierophantic locations of sacred power.

Unlike Dodanvela, the "*sthalapurāṇas*" of Vegiriya and Hunapahura are quite brief and uncomplicated. Indeed, at Vegiriya, local oral traditions are dominated by stories about Henakande Biso Baṇḍārā, a local goddess whose myth is connected to the sanctity of the *dēvālaya*'s "water-cutting" site. (We shall discuss that myth in Chapter 7.) Yet the following story about the founding of the Vegiriya *dēvālaya* is well known throughout the village area and has even found its way into a number of tourist guidebooks for the Kandyan area.

> Bhuvaneka Bāhu [the IVth, A.D. 1341–1351] was riding his horse through the area where the *dēvālaya* is now located. Suddenly, his horse came to an abrupt halt and the king was thrown from his mount. After he had struggled to his feet, the king noticed that his horse was kneeling in front of a footprint embossed on a large rock that is now located within the *dēvālaya* grounds. The king spotted an old woman living in a nearby *cadjun* hut and asked her if there was a sacred place nearby. She said that there was no *dēvālaya* in the area but that she knew that the place was sacred. So, the king searched the area looking for a *dēvālaya*. In a nearby cave, into which the present *dēvālaya* is now built, he found the images of Nātha Dēviyō and his queen, Biso Baṇḍāra. He proceeded to build the *dēvālaya* around the images and to endow it for its well-being in perpetuity. He named it Vegiriya because the rock cave with the two images inside was filled with white ants [brackets mine].

We have seen in Chapter 4 how Avalokiteśvara/Nātha was incorporated into the religion of the Gampola court. Now from the village perspective, a myth articulates royal *re*cognition of Nātha's power. Once the king recognizes that power, he moves to incorporate it or to domesticate it by constructing a *dēvālaya,* which he then in turn endows. Significantly, the images of Avalokiteśvara and Tārā (see Plates 24 and 25) are here presented as having long been lost. Once found, they are hallowed. But the king first had to be jolted into this recognition by means of humiliation.

The "*sthalapurāṇa*" of Hunapahura also contains the similar motif of royal power recognizing Nātha:

> The Āryacakravarti of Jaffna demanded tributes from the Sinhala king at Kotte [Parākramabāhu VI]. So, the king requested that his step-son, Sapumal Kumāra

> [who later becomes Bhuvanekabahu VI] engage the Āryacakravarti's forces in battle. Having so agreed, Sapumal began his march from the Nāga Vihāra at Śrī Jayawardhanapura where, underneath a Nā tree, he swore his resolve to be victorious. After several days of marching, he came to the base of this rock mountain and pitched his camp for the night. As he and his men prepared to depart in the morning, they heard a lizard loudly screeching from a nearby Nā tree. Sapumal took this as a very favorable omen and vowed that if he defeated the Āryacakravarti's forces in battle, he would build a *dēvālaya* in the cave located across from the Nā tree. Following his defeat of the Āryacakravarti and the unification of Lanka under the umbrella of Parākramabāhu [the VIth], Sapumal built the Hunapahura Nātha *dēvālaya* and had an image of Nātha carved out of the wood of that Nā tree installed in the cave [brackets mine].

We have previously discussed the Hunapahura *dēvālaya* image attributed to Sapumal (see Plate 28) in Chapter 3, and contemporary practices at Hunapahura Nātha *Dēvālaya* are described and analyzed in Chapter 8. That this image is so clearly linked to the iconographic traditions of Avalokiteśvara, that the myth links the *dēvālaya* with Parākramabāhu VIth's rule in Kotte, that the myth also has to do with the continuing Sinhala-Tamil rift, and that the Nā tree figures significantly as a protective power are all very suggestive. That is, key ingredients in the mythic stratigraphy of Nātha that we have identified elsewhere all seem to come into play here. Nātha and the god of the Nā tree function as national guardian deities in consonance with their role as previously depicted in the fourteenth-century Sagama rock inscription. The power of the *dēvālaya* is domesticated by royal recognition.

While the "*sthalapurāṇas*" of Vegiriya and Hunapahura are straightforward and stress royal roles in the origins of these sacred places, the mythic accounts of Dodanvela involve us in a much more complex discussion. Here, as in Chapter 7, we will see how the cult of Nātha blended with more local traditions regarding sacral power. Indeed, the *dēvālaya*'s identification with Nātha must be understood as rather recent and is probably the result, I will show, of Nātha's traditional association with the god of the Nā tree and the fact that Maitrī's *bodhi*, under which the future buddha will gain enlightenment, is said to be this very species of tree.

The myth of the origins of the Dodanvela *dēvālaya* is chanted every *kemmara* day by the *kapurāla*. A written version of the myth has been preserved in popular *vitti* literature as well.[5] Here is its translation from the Sinhala:

> When the people of Dodanvela had to endure a period of suffering, this god appeared to bring about prosperity.
>
> This deity, never ill-disposed, manifests his power by means of miracles of water and fire. Let us worship him, the Dodanvela *dēva* and speak of his origins.

A farmer came here to make a *chena*. He began to fell a young Nā tree from which blood poured out in all ten directions.

He fell down in fear and fainted. In his dream he was the *dēva*. The farmer understood the message and was overjoyed.

He offered food to the god in a *kenda* leaf. He lit a lamp filled with water.

The farmer worshipped reverentially there. He called all those who were about the place and told them of the powers of the *dēva*. Upon hearing him, they also worshipped the god.

A *kōvila* [modest shrine] was built there, with compounds at appropriate points. The god made his presence felt by displaying his powers. He also vanquished the Tamil *yakkhas*.

The king Dharmatissa dreamt of fire emanating from his hands and feet; there was a *yakkha* in the Nā tree; the *yakkha* forcibly took his sword.

The king went there and declared that if the god extended his powers to him, he would make a mansion and donate much.

The king sat on his seat and touched the Nā tree; instantly he began to perspire profusely. Thereafter, he was carried away.

The king offered his sword to the god, built a mansion, and donated lands. The god also received many gifts of money. In deciding cases of disputes, he showed his grace with compassion.

While returning from the Balane War, King Rājasingha was passing this way on a palanquin. His ministers told him that it was customary to get down at the site of the *dēvālaya,* but the king did not heed their words. As a result, the pole of the king's palanquin broke in two.

The king went to the *dēvālaya* and threatened the *kapurāla:* "If you don't see that the palanquin is repaired, I shall kill off your entire clan."

The *kapurāla* thought: "If the power of the god is not demonstrated today, my entire clan will perish. He surely would behead us all and burn the *dēvālaya* down."

Then the *kapurāla* joined the pole by winding a silk cloth around the broken joint, sprinkled a sandal-milk mixture and rose water upon it. He held the broken joint over a lamp, smoked it with resin, and chanted his yātikāva.

The sound "kiri-kiri" came from the joint. The king and the ministers fell down in fear. The pole joined itself and the palanquin overturned. The king and his ministers then began worshipping and respectfully stepped back.

King Rājasingha climbed on to the rock at Hapuwa-gala and declared by drum beat that the building of a new *dēvālaya* would commence on the next Wednesday so he might offer his wealth to the god.

He constructed a three storied mansion, offered his hat, clothes, the golden sword and the palanquin.

> For the *dēvālaya*, he donated highlands as well as fields from all quarters, and decided to plant a Nā grove there. He declared that a *perahära* should be conducted there annually. Then, shedding tears of joy, he worshipped the god.
>
> From the *dēvālaya* to the Gatambe ford, he laid a street and planted Nā trees on both sides of it. He granted lands so that it might be maintained.
>
> The Portuguese then came carrying burning torches at the corridor of the *dēvālaya* in order to set it to fire. The god gave a glance and sent wasps and black ants to attack them.
>
> Cobras and vipers entangled their path; they lost their way in confusion. Through fear they ran to the forest and got lost there. This shows the supreme power of this god.

While the myth proper ends here, there is an interesting epilogue. Until 1970, Rājasinha's crown, vestments, and sword actually had been preserved inside the Dodanvela *dēvālaya* for a period of over 300 years. The Ceylon National Museum in Kandy took custody of these items in 1970, and within a matter of weeks they were reported missing. When Dodanvela villagers were suspected in the case by the Kandy police, they indignantly resorted to sorcery in self-defense. As far as I am aware, the case of the missing royal accoutrements has never been solved. A facsimile of Rājasingha's crown is now on display at the museum in Kandy.

There is some historicity to this myth. In his authoritative study of the Portuguese presence in Ceylon, Pieris [1914, vol. 2: 212] has referred to Rājasinha's visit to the Dodanvela *dēvālaya* during which the king acknowledged that the "God of Battles" had given his answer to the question of whether or not the Sinhalese would be successful in their military campaign. However, its historical value for us lies not so much in corroboration of this sort. Rather, its significance can also be seen in the manner in which we gain some insight into the evolution of the cult of Nātha.

In the study of myth, sometimes that which is not stated can be just as important as that which is stated. In this particular myth, nowhere is Nātha Dēviyō actually mentioned by name despite the fact that all villagers and *dēvālaya* officials in Dodanvela now believe or assume that it refers to Nātha's power made manifest. The fact of the matter is that this particular mode of sacred manifestation, a tree pouring forth blood when cut, is a well-known instance in Sinhala traditional folklore. A similar instance of a tree bleeding is told in the Ambedke *sthalapurāṇa*.

Stories with this motif ultimately derive from the cult of *yakṣas*, who originally were regarded as benign tree spirits. In Sri Lanka, vestiges of tree worship remain conspicuous in the manner in which Śrī Mahābodhi in Anuradhapura, and its saplings spread throughout the country, continue to be propitiated (although decidedly within a cultic fashion that has undergone a

thorough process of "buddhicization"). It is also evident in the manner in which *jak* trees are cultically addressed and venerated before being taken for *kap* or before being cleared away for construction. But of more specific significance to this myth is that the tree that bleeds is a Nā tree.

In Chapter 5, we noted that Nātha's *laukika* profile seemed to be similar to Vibhīṣana's at Kelaniya. Vibhīṣana, it should be remembered, is king of the *rakṣas* with a specially recognized power over the *yakṣas*. Earlier on, we also noted that in the fourteenth-century Sagama rock inscription, Nātha acted along with the "god of the Nā tree" in order to show Lanka's rulers the way to victory in battle. The power of Nātha *dēvālayas* is also associated with Nā trees at Hunapahura. And, as we have noted, the Nā tree is regarded as the future Buddha Maitrī's bodhi. At Dodanvela at least, the cult of the Nā tree (rooted in the veneration of tree spirits) has been assimilated into the cult of Nātha and in the process affected the manner in which Nātha's *laukika* power is understood.

It is likely that the Dodanvela *Dēvālaya* was originally dedicated to the god of the Nā tree rather than to Nātha Dēviyō. There are several indications that support this likelihood. Not only is Nātha Dēviyō never specifically mentioned in the *dēvālaya*'s pool of myth and legend, but the *dēvālaya kapurāla* and *basnāyaka nilamē* do not join with the Pasgama, Vegiriya, and Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya* official contingents during the annual Äsaḷa Perahära processions in Kandy. This indicates that at least as late as the mideighteenth century, the *dēvālaya* was not officially associated with Nātha Dēviyō. Moreover, as late as the end of the nineteenth century, the *dēvālaya* was known to A. C. Lawrie [vol. 1: 175] by the name of Nāhāmigē Kōvil ("the shrine of the Nā god"). Furthermore, the sanctum sanctorum provides conclusive iconographic evidence that during the reign of Narendra Simha, when the present structure was reportedly rehabilitated, Nātha Dēviyō was not the god represented therein, for, inside the sanctum sanctorum, three standing clay images of royally bedecked figures are installed as the objects of veneration. The central image, flanked by two lesser figures of similar style and symbolism, are all iconographically similar to the manner in which *baṇḍāra*-class images such as Piṭiye are represented. Deities of this class, as we have seen with Piṭiye, are frequently associated with *yakṣa* origins. Finally, Barnett [1916] has cited a very significant myth in the *Perahära Malaya* related to the tradition of Dodanvela Dēva, the local name that was attached to the god of the Nā tree:

> Nine persons born of the same mother bathed at the "pool of rapids" and never reappeared from the water. They became *baṇḍāras* in the forest of Nā trees which graced the site. Their names were Mahana Baṇḍāra, Kuḍa Baṇḍāra, Jayavīra Baṇḍāra, Ulapane Baṇḍāra, Yāma-siṃha Baṇḍāra, Māṇik Baṇḍāra, Lama Baṇḍāra, Kumāra Baṇḍāra, Ahasthana Baṇḍāra and Mūlasthana Baṇḍāra

> [apparently Dodanvela Dēva, whose former seat, according to Barnett, was in Kandy]. These bandara deities have been worshipped by means of Perahära procession at the "pool of the rapids" ever since a man named Vanatunga cut down a Nā tree which dripped its blood upon him and consequently caused his death and the deaths of his kinsmen in seven days [78–79; brackets mine].

Barnett reports that at the end of this story's recitation, Upulvan, Pattinī, Dodanvela Dēva, and the nine Baṇḍāras are invoked for protection.

Hints of the switch in the god's identity from the god of the Nā tree or Dodanvela Dēva to that of Nātha Dēviyō are indicated in Lawrie's late-nineteenth-century record of *rājakāriya* services still in force at the *dēvālaya* today. Here we find a local village assigned the *rājakāriya* duty of carrying the *paliha* (flag or emblem) of Nātha Dēviyō in *perahära* processions.

It is very possible that the merger of Nātha with the god of the Nā tree at Dodanvela was facilitated by linguistic "semantic redistributions."[6] If we divide this process into three stages, we initially find three different words connotating very different entities that have ultimately been collapsed into the designation of one "divine reality." In the first stage, we have the term *nāga* being shortened to become *Nā,* designating a tree inhabited by a spirit. Then, we also have the tradition of the *nāga*/Nā tree specifically identified as Maitrī's *bodhi* tree. Finally, we have the name Nātha designating the god of Senkadagala, who was identified with Avalokiteśvara. At the second stage, we have the conflation of identities of Nātha with Maitrī, the future Buddha. Here, as we have noted, Nātha/Maitrī's *bodhi* tree will be the Nā tree. At this same stage, we also have the emergent term Nā-hāmi ("Lord of the Tree") being used. Finally, at the third stage, the "Lord of the Tree" (Nā-hāmi) is identified as Nāthasvāmi (Lord Nātha) or Nāthasāmi, which came to be shortened to Nā-hāmi in Sinhala. Hence, with Nā-hāmi simultaneously referring to the Lord of the Tree and Nātha Dēviyō, the identities of the two were finally collapsed into one at Dodanvela. This semantic confusion or "redistribution" abetted the conflation of these motifs, which, as we have seen, were closely associated with one another in popular tradition. The historical product is a combining of various supernatural powers into one deity.

While the myths of Dodanvela *Dēvālaya* help us to establish that the *dēvālaya*'s association with Nātha is comparatively recent and probably the by-product of Nātha's conflation with the god of the Nā tree, the wider significance of these *dēvālaya sthalapurāṇa*s should not be lost. Two other stories from Dodanvela emphasize the central theme regarding the relationship between royalty and localized divine powers.

The first is a local oral tradition connected to Narendra Siṃha, who, as we have noted, is credited with having rehabilitated the Dodanvela *Dēvālaya* and, as we saw in Chapter 5, is known to have been a patron of *baṇḍāra*-class

deities such as Piṭiye. Insecure in his reign, Narendra Siṃha is said to have vowed to rehabilitate Dodanvela if he was successful against his would-be usurpers, the Kandyan nobility. His further connections to the village of Dodanvela are evident by the fact that the person who was commissioned to write a ballad about Piṭiye came from Dodanvela village.

The second oral tradition is far more extensive and more to the point at hand. The story runs as follows:

> A certain Kandyan king [identity not known] accepted an offer of the king of Kalinga to present his daughter in marriage to a Kalinga prince. Before his daughter's departure to Kalinga, the king went on pilgrimage to the most important *dēvālaya*s of the Kandyan kingdom to ask the gods' protection for his daughter's journey. He did not, however, come to Dodanvela. Consequently, while the princess was crossing the ocean to India, her ship mysteriously foundered. News of this development quickly reached the Kandyan king, who immediately consulted his advisors. His advisors told him how Rājasinha had been temporarily delayed at Dodanvela and urged the king to undertake a pilgrimage there. The king agreed and came to the *dēvālaya* where he entreated the god to release his daughter's ship. In devotion to the god, he planted a line of Nā trees along the path leading from the *dēvālaya* to the *dēvālaya*'s "water-cutting" site on the Mahaweli Ganga. He further endowed the *dēvālaya* so that it could hold its own annual *perahära*. The princess's ship was then allowed to proceed in safety to its destination.

In Chapter 7, we shall endeavor to show how symbolic rites of power cultically celebrated in Kandy and in rural villages where Nātha *dēvālaya*s are located express a pattern of radiating and contracting sacral power. We shall show how the concerns for power on the periphery (the villages) were recognized and absorbed into the larger symbolic system of ritual in the old Kandyan kingdom. In short, we shall show how the power of the king was not just cosmically given, but seen as dependent upon village power.

In our consideration of the *dēvālaya* "*sthalapurāṇa*s" and other local mythic traditions, we have seen how this very motif of lower power is so clearly expressed. The power of the kingship is seen as checked by the power of the village, represented in myth by the sacral power present in local *dēvālaya*s. At Vegiriya, Bhuvanekabāhu IV is humbled when thrown from his horse and the cult of Avalokiteśvara/Nātha is subsequently recognized in the Gampola court; at Dodanvela, Rājasinha II cannot proceed in battle until he recognizes the power of the *dēvālaya;* two other kings are also compelled to recognize and enlist the power of the god of Dodanvela in order to succeed in their specific ventures; at Hunapahura, Prince Sapumal gains victory after reverencing the power of the Nā tree. The point of these mythic tales is that the power of the kingdom is dependent upon a bilateral relationship between the

center and the periphery: the king must duly acknowledge divine (village) power upon which he is dependent; by constructing *dēvālaya*s and endowing them, he circumscribes and makes available that power in return to the villagers. In the study of South and Southeast Asian Buddhist societies, it is often the case that only the cosmic symbolism of kingship projected by the royal court has been stressed. Little attention has been paid to the manner in which royal power has been perceived on the local village level. In the myths regarding the origins of Nātha *dēvālaya*s, royal power is subordinated to divine power, not equated.

In conclusion, the oral traditions discussed in this chapter reflect the various levels of Nātha's acculturation in Sinhala religious village culture. On the immediate village level, Nātha's *laukika* power is one that maintains order through purity. In relation to the national level, it not only legitimates royalty but chastens it, puts it in its proper place.

7

Central Power, Sacred Order: Center and Periphery in the Kandyan Kingdom

Of the four major annual festivals popularly celebrated during the time of the Kandyan kings, only the Äsala Perahära in July/August continues to be feted in great magnitude. Alut Sāl *mangālyaya* (the New Rice Festivals on Durutu Pōya in January), Alut Avurudda *mangālyaya* (New Year's celebration held on April 12 and 13), and Kārtti *mangālyaya* (the Festival of Lights held on Il Poya in November) are still significant occasions at the Nātha *dēvālaya*s in Kandy and in the villages, but they are not celebrated with the pomp formerly accorded them. In contrast, the Äsaḷa Perahära may have become even more important today than it was in late medieval times. In those days, the annual processions through the streets of Kandy were dramatic, magical orchestrations of divine and royal power invoked to insure the fertility of crops and the continuation of righteous and orderly rule throughout the country. Today, the Kandy *perahära* has evolved into a full-blown, commercialized, national cultural pageant that, in addition to the traditional symbolism it still preserves, expresses the Kandyan sense of Sinhala ethnic identity in a time when the veritable unity of the nation is under great duress [Holt, 1982b]. The Kandy *perahära* has been frequently described and analyzed in its past and present state by many other scholars [see Aluvihara, 1952; Seneviratna, 1977; and especially Seneviratne, 1978: 70–88]. But as far as I know, the manner in which *perahära* rites are observed in village contexts outside of Kandy has received only passing notice [see only Gombrich, 1971: 107]. Since the village *perahära*s also continue to be celebrated with great fare, and because the other three rites have become rather subdued occurrences in the ritual

calendar at the Nātha *dēvālayas*, the religiosymbolic meaning of the latter, especially Alut Avurudda (New Year's rites), and the pivotal role played therein by the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya* will be discussed first before addressing the major significance of the *perahäras* and their sociocosmic religious symbolism.

The aim of this chapter is to further determine the religious significance of Natha's *laukika* power as it has been diffusively expressed in Sinhala Buddhist culture. In studying these annually celebrated and formerly royally sponsored rites, we can obtain a view of Nātha's power as it was perceived "from the center." In Chapter 6, through a study of oral traditions, Nātha's power and royal power were seen, from the village context, to be at once in concerted relation (the king establishes the *dēvālaya* in recognition of Nātha's [and the village's] power) and in relative opposition (the power of the king is checked by Nātha). In this chapter, the dynamic between the power of the king and the capital on the one hand and the power of the village and the *dēvālaya* on the other is also further examined. In these rites, we shall see how *Nātha*'s *laukika* power was, and still is, expended to secure and to celebrate this-worldly well-being. In the first rite, Alut Avurudda (New Year's), the Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy functions as the culture's ceremonial center, an *axis mundi* through which divine power needed for the maintenance of order, health, and prosperity is symbolically radiated (centrifugally) to other sacred places throughout the Kandyan cultural region. In the second rite, Äsaḷa Perahära, Nātha's *laukika* power has been assimilated into a series of royally sponsored and ritually symbolic acts performed publicly to insure fertility of crops through abundance of rain and the stability of the sociocosmic order throughout the kingdom. In the Äsaḷa Perahära, we shall see that power was centripetally consolidated. In our discussion, then, we shall determine if what Tambiah [1976] has called a "pulsating galactic polity" and what Geertz [1981] has called "the Theatre-State" are applicable here.

Alut Avurudda (New Year's): The Nātha *Dēvālaya* in Kandy as a Ceremonial Center

During the Alut Sāl, Alut Avurudda, and Kārtti *mangālyayas*, the village Nātha *dēvālayas* at Pasgama, Vegiriya, and Dodanwela function as receptacles for the ceremonial distribution of rice (on Alut Sāl), traditional medicines (on Alut Avurudda), and oil for the lighting of lamps (on Kārtti). As we have noted, the Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy figures very prominently in these now downplayed ritual proceedings, but during the late medieval period it was the focal point for the celebration of the New Year throughout the country. While

Obeyesekere has noted that Totagamuva was the chief seat of the Nātha cult during the time of Śrī Rāhula [Obeyesekere, 1984: 290], it is clear that at least from the eighteenth century (and probably from the late-sixteenth-century reign of Vimala Dharma Sūrya I) to the present, the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya* has functioned as the main shrine of the Nātha cult. Nātha's role as the divine legitimator of the Kandyan kings is responsible for this shift of venue and the prime reason rites of a national character were centered there.

The New Year's celebration remains an important festive season in modern Sri Lanka, but the role played by the *dēvālaya*s traditionally has diminished in scope and importance.[1] The April New Year's signals the beginning of the modern Sinhala holiday season, which includes Vesak Pōya in May, Poson Pōya in June (commemorating the coming of Aśoka's son Mahinda and the beginnings of Buddhism in Lanka), followed by the Äsaḷa Perahära in July/August. As with most New Year's celebrations, the emphasis here is on renewal, purity, and health.

Before the approach of Alut Avurudda, the Diyavaḍana Nilamē (literally: "minister of water-service"; now: the lay custodian of the *Daḷadā Māligāva*) determines the timing of five auspicious moments to be observed during the New Year's festivities. In Kandyan times, these were determined by the king's astrologer. The five auspicious moments include: (1) the precise time when the new year begins; (2) the auspicious moment for taking the year's first bath; (3) for eating the first meal; (4) for undertaking the year's first business transaction or commencing work; and (5) for presenting the first gift. In the times of the Kandyan kings, the exact moment of the beginning new year was observed at the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya* with a cadence of drumming that continued for a 20- to 40-minute liminal period "between the years" when no activity of any sort was recommended. At the precise moment of the new year's arrival, the event was announced by the king to the public by a ringing of bells from the Nātha and Viṣṇu *dēvālaya*s [Davy, 1983: 126]. The observance of the year's first bath also seems to have involved the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya* particularly, and, as we shall see, the ritual system for the distribution of medicinal juices from the Kandy Natha *dēvālaya* used for the inaugural bath is highly symbolic.

Davy describes the ritualized routine of the king's first bath as it was reported to him in the early nineteenth century:

> At the hour appointed for the second ceremony, young women of certain families, with lighted papers in their hands, and a silver dish containing undressed rice and turmeric water, stood at a little distance from the king; when he directed his face to the south-east, with imbal-leaves under his feet and nuga-leaves in his hand and applied the medicinal juices to his head and body, they thrice exclaimed: "Increase of age to our sovereign of five thousand years—increase

> of age as long as the sun and moon last—increase of age as long as heaven and earth exist" [126–27].

At the appointed moment, the rest of the people followed the king's example of a bath, which "was kept with the same formalities . . . and, as then the juices of medicinal plants and perfumed oils were used, that had been prepared *secundum artem* within the walls of the Nāta-dēwāle, and at an auspicious period" [126–27]. Herein, we clearly find expression of the themes of renewel, purity, and good health. The young virgins of *radala*-caste status carrying turmeric and fresh, undressed rice, and lighted flames are all emblematic of the stress upon purity and fertility. In effect, the king was enacting a priestly function on behalf of his people by undertaking the initial act of ritual purification for the new year. The reference to his living for "five thousand years" indicates the role he shared with Avalokiteśvara/Nātha and the other guardian deities of the island to protect and promote the Buddha's *dharma* until the coming of the next Buddha Maitrī's new dispensation. It signals again the conflations constitutive of the bodhisattva/god/king.

That these medicinal juices were prepared and distributed at the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya* is very significant to P. L. Prematilleke [1983], the academician in charge of the ongoing Sri Lanka/UNESCO archaeological excavations at the *dēvālaya*. In his first progress report, he writes:

> The continuation of Mahāyānist practices amidst the Theravāda tradition of Buddhism is best exemplified by the worship of Nātha Avalokiteśvara at the Nātha dēvāla in Kandy. Avalokiteśvara is said to be a deity possessed with the efficacy of healing power of illness [*sic*]. It is interesting to note that the Nātha Dēvāla in Kandy practices an important ceremony connected with medicine on the occasion of the New Year celebrations. Senerat Paranavitane [*sic*] comments: "On this occasion, the Royal physicians had to superintend the preparation of a thousand pots of juices of wild medicinal plants at the Nātha Dēvāla from where, carefully covered and sealed, they were sent to the Palace and distributed with much ceremony to the other temples" [4].

The ceremonial distribution of this traditional medicine is still carried out today and in much the same fashion as oil and rice are distributed during the Kārtti and Alut Sāl *mangālyaya*s. In Kandyan times, the temples referred to above by Paranavitana numbered 64. Collectively, these *vihāraya*s and *dēvālaya*s received a total of 108 shares. But today, only 47 places continue to receive a total of 67 distributed shares. According to the monastic incumbent residing at the Kandy Nātha *Dēvālaya*, some places and their shares are now omitted because they have ceased to send representatives to the ceremonies or the temples themselves have fallen into disuse (see map of Kandyan Highlands). The relative traditional importance attached to each *dēvālaya* and

vihāraya seems to be indicated by the quantity of shares it receives. As of Kārtti *mangālyaya* on Il Poya, November 1984, the participating *vihārayas* and *dēvālayas* and the shares of oil they received were as listed in Table 7.1.[2]

Table 7.1. Sacred Places in the Kandyan Highlands

Temple	Shares
Gadaladeniya Vihāraya	2
Hindagala Vihāraya	2
Nātha Dēvālaya Bo Tree	2
Nātha Dēvālaya (Kandy)	3
Pale Dēvālaya (for Dēvatā Baṇḍāra within above)	1
Viṣnu Dēvālaya	4
Pale Dēvālaya (for Dēvatā Baṇḍāra within above)	2
Alutnuvara Dēvālaya (Dēvatā Baṇḍāra)	2
Kataragama Dēvālaya (Kandy)	3
Pale Dēvālaya (for Dēvatā Baṇḍāra within above)	1
Gaṇa Dēviyō Kōvil (Kandy)	1
Pattinī Piḷimagē (inside Pattinī Dēvālaya compound)	1
Pattinī Dēvālaya (Kandy)	3
Hanguranketa Mahā Viṣṇu Dēvālaya	2
Hanguranketa Pattinī Dēvālaya	1
Ambekke Piḷimagē (Kataragama)	1
Pale Dēvālaya (for Dēvatā Baṇḍāra inside above)	1
Pasgama Nātha Dēvālaya	1
Dodanwela Nātha Dēvālaya	2
Pale Dēvālaya (for Pattini located nearby above)	1
Lankatilaka Vihāraya	2
Vegiriya Nātha Dēlālaya	2
Alawatugoda Dēvālaya (Saman)	1
Ganegoda Dēvālaya (Viṣṇu)	1
Pale Dēvālaya (for Dēvatā Baṇḍāra inside above)	1
Morape Dēvālaya (Pattinī)	1
Gurudeniya Dēvālaya (Piṭiye)	1
Walahagoda Dēvālaya (Piṭiye)	1
Pilawatugoda Dēvālaya (Piṭiye)	1
Nātha Dēvālaya Piḷimagē (Kandy)	1
Suryagoda Vihāraya	1
Mahā Viṣṇu Dēvālaya Piḷimagē (Kandy)	1
Daluke Vihāraya	1
Daluke Dēvālaya (?)	1
Wanahagala Vihāraya	1
Bambaragala Vihāraya	1
Ridi Vihāraya	1
Wattegala Vihāraya	1

Table 7.2. Distributed Shares of Traditional Medicine

Deity	Share
Nātha	11
Viṣṇu	8
Pattinī	8
Dēvatā Baṇḍāra (Däḍimunda)	8
Kataragama	4
Piṭiye	3
Saman	1
Gaṇa (Gaṇeṣa)	1

As this list indicates, the Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy receives a total of 6 shares, the most given in total to any one *dēvālaya*. In addition, when the shares for Pasgama (1), Vegiriya (2), and Dodanvela (2) are combined with the Kandy total, Nātha *dēvālaya*s receive more shares (11) than the shrines dedicated to any other deities. Nātha's ranking as the highest deity within the traditional pantheon seems to be illustrated by this ritual fact. Collectively, however, the *sangha*, represented by the *vihāraya*s, receives a total of 12 shares. Unsurprisingly, this figure quantitatively indicates that the *sangha* continues to maintain the most prestige in religious matters. The total distribution of shares to deities, according to our list, is listed in Table 7.2. In all, though the *vihāraya*s receive the most shares collectively if we are to consider them as one unit (the *sangha*), the *dēvālaya*s actually receive 55 of the 67 shares, thus indicating not only the perceived efficacy of the gods in these rites but the dominance of divine propitiation in medieval practical religion. The importance of the four national guardian deities of the Kandyan kingdom (Nātha, Viṣṇu, Pattinī, and Kataragama) is also clearly reflected in the fact that, between them, they receive most of the shares distributed to *dēvālaya*s. While these figures seem to reflect the degree to which prestige was accorded various deities within the Sinhala pantheon, an anomaly occurs in relation to Dēvatā Baṇḍāra (Däḍimunda), who receives no less than 8 shares. This would seem to indicate that the popularity of this god, well known for his connection to sorcery, is well maintained. However, it must be noted that the only autonomous Däḍimunda *dēvālaya* in this list is Alutnuvara Dēvālaya, which is this deity's chief seat. The rest of his *dēvālaya*s are located within the larger compounds of *dēvālaya*s dedicated to one of the four national guardian deities. As such, his inferior ranking as a *baṇḍāra*-class deity beneath the national gods becomes apparent.

More important than the numbers indicated above, however, is the fact that originally the number of sacred places to which shares were distributed was

64 and the number of shares originally distributed was 108. The number 64 is of great symbolic importance. This symbolism can be seen in the *Mandārampura Puvata,* a long eighteenth-century poem, which describes the occasion in 1747 when the newly chosen king received his name as Kīrtti Śrī Rājasinha at the Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy:

> Having dressed in silk with sixty-four royal ornaments,
> Wearing the single string and the golden thread round his hip,
> [the king] walked in a *perahära* to the shrine of Nātha Dēviyō
> Paid him homage and offered betel for the auspicious omen.
>
> The meritorious Nātha Dēviyō has conferred on our illustrious Lord of Men
> The name of Kīrtti Śrī Rājasinha with his own sacred hand.
> Today and from today the whole of Lanka will obey his command.[3]

Ariyapala [1956: 68–84] provides a list and a discussion of the 64 royal ornaments and notes that Sinhala kings are described as ceremoniously wearing them on ritual occasions in the *Pūjāvaliya,* the *Thūpavaṃsa,* and the *Saddharmālaṃkāraya.* These references, therefore, indicate that the tradition of the king wearing 64 ornaments goes back to at least the thirteenth century A.D.

The number 64 is also frequently found in connection with royal action and divine sanction in medieval south India as well. For instance, at the Great Temple in Thanjavur in Tamilnadu, which was built at the height of Chola power during the eleventh century, the interior side of the temple's outer wall was painted with 64 *līla*s (plays; divine actions) of Śiva representing the manner in which that deity had come to the defense and rescue of the dynasty's suzerainty. One hundred and eight *lingam*s, the chief sacerdotal symbol of Śiva, were also placed along the interior of the same wall. Together, these symbolic representations are taken to reflect the divine power that supports the world and legitimates its order.

In Chapter 3, we noted that in the classical traditions of Indian Buddhist iconography, Avalokiteśvara is represented in 108 different forms. Further, the number 108 is frequently found in connection with the efficacy of *mantra*s. In Sri Lanka, *mantra*s may have to be chanted 108 times to bring about their desired potency. The beads used in counting *mantras* in the *navaguṇavāḷa* used by laity also number 108. Thus, the numbers 64 and 108 symbolize at once divine manifestation and its consequently realized power in the world.

In the context of traditional Kandyan ritual, it would seem that the same symbolism is at work: the 64 ornaments worn by the king symbolize the 64 sacred places of the Kandyan kingdom to which the 108 shares of ritual substances were distributed to empower the sacrality and order of the kingdom. Or, perhaps more accurately, 64 places were designated as sacred because of the fact that the king wore 64 royal ornaments. That the king wore

these 64 ornaments is symbolic of the popular belief that the king was a microcosm of the kingdom's sacrality and divinely sanctioned power. Since we have noted that the king received his royal name from Nātha at the Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy, it goes almost without saying that the divinely sanctioned power magically distributed through these ritual substances was thought to be vested with Nātha's protective and curative powers. How this pattern of the symbolic distribution of power was precisely expressed within the context of village rituals will become clear as we examine the proceedings of village *dēvālaya perahäras*. At this point, we simply want to underscore the sacerdotal role played by kingship and the Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy: functionally, the Nātha *dēvālaya* and the king were regarded as centrifugal pivots from which power was radiated to the 64 sacred places of the kingdom and beyond. The Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy was thus the centrifugal ceremonial center of ritual life in the kingdom par excellence. The centripetal center, as we shall see, was the *Daḷadā Māligāva*.

The central importance of the Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy as a ceremonial center for the old Sinhala kingdom is also evident in considerations of some of the more vital trappings said to be traditionally contained within the *dēvālaya* grounds. Tradition holds that in the small *dāgäba* located to the northwest of the *dēvālaya* building proper, the alms bowl relic of the Buddha was enshrined (until it was looted by vandals in 1889) [Seneviratna, 1983b: 91]. The sanctity attached to this relic is third only to Śrī Mahābodhi and the *Daḷadā*.[4] The massive *bodhi* tree within the *dēvālaya*'s compound is also accorded great sanctity. According to the *Mahābodhivaṃsa,* it is one of 32 saplings on the island that have been grafted from Śrī Mahābodhi in Anuradhapura. The presence of both relics (the bowl and the tree) within the *dēvālaya* complex is unprecedented in Kandyan Sinhala sacred geography. The *dēvālaya* is also very unique in that Theravāda *bhikkhus* (from the Asgiriya chapter) have taken up residence within the sacred precincts. This practice, which to my knowledge has not occurred at any other *dēvālaya* on the island, stems from the time monks were asked to teach at the first nonmonastic lay Buddhist school established in Sri Lanka during the last decade of the nineteenth century. This school, Dharmaraja College, was also located on the grounds of the *dēvālaya*. Finally, the *dēvālaya* was also the site of the *Yuktiya Iṣṭa Kirīma Ghanṭāraya* ("Bell of Justice"), which was rung whenever royal decisions on cases brought before the king for final adjudication were announced. The bell was a symbol of Nātha's guarantee that the king's justice was fair and backed by divine authority. In addition to the central importance played by the Nātha *dēvālaya* in the four major annual rites, these details further underscore the intimate relation obtaining between Nātha and the legitimacy of the Kandyan kingship in traditional Buddhist Sri Lanka. It should not be forgotten that the

Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy is located directly across the street from the king's former palace.

Before addressing the complex symbolism of the Kandyan *perahära* rites, there are further expressions of symbolism attached to New Year's rites that need to be taken into consideration. While formerly there was an especially appointed time for the king to bathe in the consecrated medicinal juices prepared at the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya,* there was (and still is) an astrologically determined time for the bathing (*nānumura*) of consecrated images at all *dēvālaya*s. This ceremony is still carried out today amid a host of ritual prohibitions. Only the *kapurāla*s of each *dēvālaya* and especially selected assistants are allowed to perform this duty. In preparation, those directly involved in the rite must observe a preparatory period of chastity, ritual bathings, and a diet of special food. The ceremony itself is actually an elaborate mime, for the images of the gods are considered too sacred and too pure for human touch. The *kapurāla,* assisted by his attendants, takes a mirror and, with the specially prepared medicinal juices and a clean piece of white linen, makes imitative gestures in front of the mirror-reflected image, signifying the process of conducting a bath. At no time does he look into the reflected eyes of the image in the mirror for fear of offending the god, or from fear of not being able to absorb directly the power of the divine glance. The entire rite, despite weeks of preparation, takes little more than half an hour and is conducted privately behind the closed doors of the sanctum sanctorum. In fact, the *kapurāla* and those holding *rājakāriya* duties inside the *dēvālaya* are the only persons ever allowed inside the sanctum sanctorum. The holy images, in fact, are never seen by the worshiping public.[5] In comparison, within the sanctum sanctora of Hindu temples, especially in south India, divine images in the Indian Hindu ritual context are unveiled on several occasions each day in order for devotees to "take *darśan*" (to meditate upon or to receive "revelations" from the divine form). Moreover, Hindu deities are bathed and fed on a daily basis by attending *brahmans* as part of normal liturgical procedures. This is not the case in Buddhist Sri Lanka, at least with regard to consecrated images within Nātha *dēvālayas*. The only occasions for public viewing occur during the 5 nights of the *rāṇḍoli perahära* when the "weapons" and the insignia of the gods are mounted on elephants and paraded through town. But the image itself is never directly seen by devotees. Concerns for the purity of consecrated images seem to be every bit, if not more, compelling, resulting in even greater restricted access to the gods within the Sinhala Buddhist context.

Following the bathing of the image, the first meal (*murutan*) of the year is presented to the deity.

Finally, the contemporary Sinhala practice of exchanging gifts on New Year's is also a symbolic token of wealth and renewal. Its origins may lie in

the traditional practice, reported by Knox, that the new year was the consummate time for paying tribute to the king and for settling old debts. In those days, the *radala* presented the king with gifts of gold, jewels, arms, knives, or embroidered cloth, all of which the king ceremonially refused. As for the common people, Knox [1984] states:

> The things which the People carry as their Rents and Taxes, are Wine, Oyl, Corn [rice], Honey, Wax, Cloth, Iron, Elephant teeth, Tobacco, Money. They bring them themselves and wait at Court with them commonly diverse Months, before they be received. The great Officers tell the King, the People have brought their Rents. The King saith, "Tis well" [48; brackets mine].

These gifts were deducted as payment for what was annually owed to the king. This was also (and remains) the time at which the Nātha *dēvālaya*s receive annual rents owed to them. During New Year's, then, accounts are cleared. There is a new beginning.

In short, what has happened over the years to the New Year's celebration is that it has become fully nationalized and, of course, secularized. The *dēvālaya*s are no longer the focus of the festivities. The focus is clearly within the family. The Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya* lost its centrality to the annual celebration with the disestablishment of kingship in 1815. And in the villages of Pasgama, Dodanvela, and Vegiriya, the open *dēvālaya*s are almost incidental to the New Year's activities given over primarily to fellowship with friends and family. Still, the five auspicious moments are carefully observed, and, with their observances, the *laukika* motifs of renewal, health, purity, and prosperity are celebrated.

Symbolism of Kandyan *Perahära*s: Making Rain, Fertility, and "Conquest by Righteousness"

The annual village *perahära*s of the Nātha *dēvālaya*s in Pasgama, Vegiriya, and Dodanvela are held during the month following the celebration of the national Äsaḷa Perahära in Kandy. During the same time, a number of other *perahära*s at important *dēvālaya*s that are part of the ritual system in the Kandyan cultural area, such as Ambekke, Gadaladeniya, Lankatilaka, and Hanguranketa, are also conducted. *Perahära*s (literally: "processions") are a chief form of public ritual observance in Sri Lanka with an ancient history. Their celebrations in the Kandyan area bring to climactic conclusion the local festival season in the up-country liturgical calendar.

Historical changes are clearly evident in the *perahära* proceedings, especially at Kandy. When Knox [78] was writing in the seventeenth century,

the Kandy *perahära* was celebrated in June or July, while Davy [128] reports in the early nineteenth century that it was always observed in July. The Kandy *perahära* is now held during the traditional month of Äsaḷa, which overlaps our months of July and August. The currently famous colorful displays of Kandyan dance were not added to the processions until 1919, following the resumption of the festivities after the Sinhala-Muslim riots of 1915. More importantly, the Daḷadā (Tooth Relic), which is now the primary ritual symbol and focal point of the processions, was not incorporated into the Kandy *perahära* until 1755, when Thai monks, imported by King Kīrtti Śrī to reestablish legitimate lines of monastic ordination for the Malwatte and Asgiriya chapters of the Kandyan *sangha,* were offended that the king would sponsor a major celebration in honor of the gods to the exclusion of the Buddha [Malalgoda, 1976: 64]. It was precisely during this time that Nātha was also first incorporated into the the annual processions and given the prime position immediately following the Daḷadā, signifying his formal recognition as the next Buddha. Before that time, the Kandy Äsaḷa Perahära was chiefly a rainmaking rite held in order to entreat the gods to send abundant rainfall for the consequent fertility of crops. Indeed, the position of the Diyavaḍana Nilamē, which, following the disestablishment of kingship in 1815, has evolved into one of great importance and now constitutes the politically significant role of lay custodian of the Daḷadā Māligāva in charge of its temporal affairs and the organization of the *perahära,* was originally the minister of water service. This position was appointed directly by the king himself, who, it was assumed, was capable of producing rain on the basis of power derived from his religious merit. In fact, abundant rain and the fertility of crops were taken as indications of the king's righteousness. Thus, the king was responsible for sponsoring the annual processions, and the Diyavaḍana Nilamē coordinated all ritual activities according to the king's wishes.

The "water-increasing" symbolism embedded in the *perahära*'s ritual proceedings has a long and detailed history that has been reviewed at some length by Godakumbura [1970], who, in turn, has relied heavily upon the insights of Paranavitana. During the time of Knox [79], the *perahära* festival was primarily held in honor of Alutnuvara Dēviyō and to a lesser extent Pattinī and Kataragama. Alutnuvara Dēviyō today is none other than Däḍimunda, whose chief shrine is now located in the village of Alutnuvara about 15 miles southeast of modern-day Kegalle. But at that time, Alutnuvara Dēviyō was connected in the popular mind to Viṣṇu, for not only did Davy's [128] early-nineteenth-century informants report that the festival was originally held in honor of Viṣṇu's birthday, but it is well established that the *dēvālaya* image of the god Upulvan (Viṣṇu) was spirited away from the Devinuwara on the south coast of the island and transported to up-country Alutnuvara in order to

protect it from Portuguese desecration in the sixteenth century. Eventually, the image was brought to Kandy for royal protection and installed in the Mahā (Viṣṇu) Dēvālaya, where it remains today. While Seneviratna [1984], on the basis of textual exegeses and iconographic considerations, argues that this god was originally none other than Rāma, in the popular mind today he remains identified as Viṣṇu. Furthermore, both Godakumbura [1970] and Paranavitana [1953] have argued that Upulvan is ultimately to be linked to the Vedic deity Varuṇa, who "controls the rainy skies and streaming waters."[6] If this is so, then the rainmaking function of the gods in the Kandy *perahära* is clearly apparent, at least from the time of Knox's seventeenth-century account.

In addition to the connection with Varuṇa, there remains yet another series of rainmaking traditions and water symbolisms that have been incorporated into the *perahära* proceedings in various ways. This incorporated amalgamation of motifs associated with rainmaking and fertility within the Äsaḷa Perahära was probably finally accomplished by Kīrtti Śrī in the middle of the eighteenth century. In particular, these include the ancient practice of royal veneration of Śrī Mahābodhi in Anuradhapura, venerating the Daḷadā, the king's own perceived power at making rain, and the powers attributed to the Vedic god Indra. We shall see instances of all of these traditions present in the discussion of *perahära* proceedings that now follows.

Godakumbura [1970] cites textual and epigraphical evidence to argue that the worship of Parjanya, a divine emanation of Indra (the rainmaking deity par excellence in Vedic tradition known for his cosmic actions that resulted in the release of life-giving waters) was worshiped by royalty in Sri Lanka as early as, if not earlier than, the reign of King Duṭṭhagāmaṇī (second century B.C.). Godakumbura holds that the cult of Parjanya, however, was largely superseded or absorbed by the emergent cult of the Śrī Mahābodhi. Elaborate rites for the care of the holy tree in Anuradhapura were established to cultivate its purported powers of fertility (especially for the birth of male progeny) and rainmaking. Included in these rites was the annual ritual watering of the sacred tree by four *kṣatriyan* virgins, who may in fact be the ritual precursors to the four *radala* maidens who blessed the Kandyan king during the observance of the New Year's inaugural purification bath. In later times, *bhikkhunīs* (ordained nuns) are known to have performed this ritual task. (Today, ritually watering Śrī Mahābodhi continues to be regarded as a highly meritorious act for Sinhala pilgrims in Anuradhapura. Moreover, it has been incorporated into *bodhi pūjā* rites periodically held at all *vihārayas* and is eagerly practiced by merit-seeking laity.) In any case, ritual watering of the Śrī Mahābodhi remained a focal point of royal cultic life in Anuradhapura until the capital was shifted to Polonnaruva.

During the Polonnaruva era, the popularity of Śrī Mahābodhi as a ritual

symbol faded somewhat with the ascending importance of the Daḷadā as the palladium of the Sinhalese people [Malalasekera, 1928: 66]. Not surprisingly, the Daḷadā was also accorded the power to make rain. During the Anuradhapura era, the orthodox *bhikkhu*s of the Mahāvihāra apparently ignored the significance of the relic, but it seems to have found a welcome sanctuary among the Abhyagirivādins and was venerated with great pomp under royal sponsorship as early as the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hien's fifth-century visit to the island [Fa-Hien, 1965: 104–7]. Its graduated importance at Polonnaruva was due to the fact that Parākramabāhu I (1153–1186) had succeeded in uniting the various factions of the *sangha* into one community, and thus many ritual traditions supported by diverse factions were sustained by the newly constituted whole. Godakumbura [1970: 108] surmises that since the Daḷadā could be transported to Polonnaruva, and Śrī Mahābodhi could not, the purported rainmaking abilities of the relic's rainmaking powers must have gained in importance. As we have noted, possession of the Daḷadā conferred legitimacy on the right to rule. It came to symbolize in general not only the material well-being of the nation but "rule-by-righteousness" as well. *Perahära*s held in its honor were not only instituted for the purpose of obtaining rain [Rajasekera, 1930: 59], and thus material well-being, but were also held to symbolize how the king "captured" order in the country by means of his own righteousness.

The symbolism of Indra seems to have come into larger play during the mid to late medieval period, especially during the reign of Parākramabāha II of Dambedeniya, who, as we have seen, had fully embraced classical Indic conceptions of kingship and had sought to establish himself as a king liberally supporting a variety of religious traditions. We have noted that the reign of this particular king seems to have paved the way for a more inclusive understanding of kingship that could accommodate the cult of Avalokiteśvara in the subsequent Gampola period. I quote at length from Godakumbura's [1970] discussion of how Parākramabāhu II wished to project himself as a worldly counterpart of Indra, and hence a great rainmaker:

> By re-enacting the deeds of the gods, done in the world beyond for the benefit of mankind, the same effect, even on a smaller scale could be attained here. The clouds were obstructed, Indra marched against Vrita with his hosts, struck the waters, killed Ahi, and released the streams. Here on earth during the time of drought, when clouds do not pour out water, the drama is enacted. Homage is first paid to Indra. The water-increaser, the king, and his retinue go in procession; after carrying out the ordained rites, the priests strike the water and bring pots of water for ritual purposes. This is the perahära and the diya-käpuma [water-cutting] of any temple. And it is done to produce rain.
>
> Rulers of certain clans in India considered themselves to be the representatives on earth of Indra in heaven with his thirty-two ministers. For example, the

> Licchavis of Visala, were compared to Indra and his assembly in the Tāvatiṃsa deva world. The Buddha himself is said to have pointed out to this oligarchy as examples of Indra and his retinue on earth [sic]. It was one of the daily duties of some kings to show themselves as Indra before the Royal Assembly. In a document which details the daily routine of King Paṇḍita Parākramabāhu of Dambedeniya [Parakramabahu II, 1236–1270], it is said that every morning the King manifested the likeness or imitated Indra before the assembly and displayed his royal splendor. This text, the *Kandavuru-sirita* says, "Seven and a half päya (three hours) after dawn, His majesty sits in state on the throne, with all the paraphernalia of Royalty, and with his musicians in attendance, showing the likeness of the king of the Gods" [110–11; brackets mine].

Godakumbura continues by citing further references in *sandēśaya* literature wherein the king was likened to Indra. Also citing the well-known poem, the *Guttilakāvyaya,* written during the fifteenth-century reign of Parākramabāhu VI and containing a description of the heavenly court, Godakumbura [1970] says: "Reading the whole passage one gets the impression that the poet was describing what he had seen in the City of Kotte" [110–11]. With regard to the later Kandyan era, he says: "Among the high-sounding epithets of the kings of Kandy, we have, 'like Śakra [Indra] who subdued the Asuras, sitting on the precious throne of the magnificent and prosperous City of Senkadagala' " [110–11; brackets mine].

This parallel symbolism between heaven and earth, between macrocosm and microcosm, and the belief that the king, by imitation, can effect the work of the gods, is a salient characteristic of classical Indian conceptions of kingship articulated within the Buddhist traditions of South and Southeast Asia [Heine-Geldern, 1942; Tambiah, 1976: 123; Sarakisyanz, 1965: 82–86; Bardwell Smith, 1980: 308–10; Davy: 141–45]. Quite clearly, the Kandyan *perahäras* are water-increasing rites that recall the cosmogonic life-giving act of Indra's slaying of Vrita: "The elephants accompanying the Perahära represent the clouds, and the drums and the music the noise of thunder and water" [Godakumbura, 1970: 112]. By extension, the torches lighting the procession's way symbolize the lightning of an oncoming storm. *Perahäras*, therefore, are ritualistic expressions of "this-worldly Indras" designed to demonstrate the parallel rainmaking powers of the king.

But the *perahära* is also, as Geertz has so clearly demonstrated within the Balinese context, a theatrical enactment of "the doctrine of the exemplary center." That is, the traditional Kandy *perahära* held in the capital city articulated and defined the power of the state in relation to the rest of the kingdom. The Kandy *perahära* is ritually paradigmatic for the "satellite" *perahäras* sponsored by village *dēvālayas*. To quote Geertz specifically on this extremely important point, the "doctrine of the exemplary center" is

> the theory that the court-and-capital is at once a microcosm of the supernatural order—an image of the universe on a smaller scale—and the material embodiment of the political order. It is not just the nucleus or the engine, or the pivot of the state, it *is* the state. The equation of the seat of rule with the dominion of rule is more than an accidental metaphor; it is a settlement of a controlling political idea—namely, that by the mere act of providing a model, a paragon, a faultless image of civilized existence, the court shapes the world around it into at least a rough approximation of its own excellence. The ritual life of the court, and in fact, the life of the court generally, is thus paradigmatic, not merely reflective, of social order. What it is reflective of, the priests declare, is a supernatural natural order, "the timeless Indian world" of the gods upon which men should, in strict proportion to their status, seek to pattern their lives [13].

Tambiah [1976] has clearly shown how this "theory" was put into practice in the classical medieval Thai state. He describes the relationship between the vertical microcosm and the macrocosm on the one hand and the horizontal center and periphery on the other as a "pulsating maṇḍala" constitutive of "galactic polity." By this means, he characterizes how "satellites" (in our case, the 64 places of the traditional Kandyan kingdom) were related to the orbits of political power fully established at the capital center. We have seen how the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya* functioned as an *axis mundi* during the annual national celebrations of the Kandyan kingdom, how ritual substances were consecrated therein before being disseminated out to the far-flung sacred places of the kingdom. The crucial relevance of Geertz's statement and Tambiah's understanding of "*maṇḍala* polity" for gaining an accurate perspective of ritual and political life in the Kandyan kingdom will become increasingly apparent as we proceed. What they signify is more than just the ritual modus operandi; they also indicate to us the very political modus vivendi. That is, we shall see that, at least in villages where Nātha *dēvālaya*s are the center of cultic life, Nātha Dēviyō "inherited" much of the symbolism attached to Indra and to Sinhala kingship in this scenario and, in the process, became a veritable symbol of royal and divine power and presence on the local village level. But first we need to specifically describe the rituals constitutive of the *perahära* complex. In so doing, we shall more clearly see both the sociopolitical and the natural symbolism of the *perahära* proceedings.

Ritual Symbols of the Kandyan *Peraháras*: *Kapa, Ran Āyudha, Rānḍoli, and Rittāge*

The inaugural rite of the *perahära* season, an act that takes place simultaneously at all the *dēvālaya*s within the network of Kandyan sacred places during a moment that has been determined to be auspicious by officials at the

Daḷadā Māligāva, is the planting of Indra's chief symbol, the *kapa*, (the Indra *khila*), a pole or post cut out of a branch from a specially chosen *jak* tree, a tree that is highly lactiferous and bears an enormous fruit weighing up to 40 kilos. The *jak* tree is thus a very apt symbol of fertility and prosperity.[7] Coomaraswamy [1956] has translated portions of the *Mayimataya*, a traditional work intended to be used by architects but actually an astrological handbook and guide to the reading of omens, which contains instructions for the felling of the *jak*, the Äsaḷa *gaha* (July/August tree):

> Know this O builders, where the magul [auspicious] kapa is to be felled, you should go to the tree's root and clear it round about, draw the aṭamagala [eight-cornered] diagram, set filled pots in the four [cardinal directional] corners, sprinkle sandal and the next day go and speak as follows: "Thou, Dēva, dwelling in this tree, be pleased to leave the tree, if thou doest wish [us] well;" thus praying, break a branch from the tree; clean and order that tree trunk, scatter flowers, betel, sandal and say "I pray thee, Dēva, go to this tree and give me thine own" [125; brackets mine].

The text then goes on to describe how to discriminate between male, female, and neuter trees. Female trees, thin at the top, are to be avoided at all costs because within them dwell *yakkhinīs* (female devils). Hollow male trees are preferred, and no risk of harm is taken if they are chosen [125]. In Kandyan times, the *kap* for all four *dēvālayas* of the national guardian deities in Kandy were taken from the very same tree, with the one closest to the root reserved for the Nātha *dēvālaya* (indicating, again, the primacy of Nātha among the four guardian deities). But now, each *dēvālaya* secures its own *kapa* and the Pattinī *dēvālaya* is apparently the only shrine of the four national guardian deities in Kandy that celebrates the occasion with traditional pomp [Seneviratne, 73–75]. While the Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy no longer seems to hold a special ritual for the taking of its *kapa*, I will quote here from my field notes of the relevant ritual activities I witnessed in 1984 at the Nātha *dēvālaya* in Vegiriya:

> In a grove of trees located nearby the premises of the *dēvālaya*, a young *jak* tree about three feet in height was selected. I was told that the tree must never have born fruit previously. The ground immediately around the young tree was ceremoniously rather than literally cleared. After a brief chant, the tree was cut and peeled with a new knife that had never before been used. The stick was then taken back, amidst a small *perahära* procession to the *dēvālaya*. There, it was planted in a stone that had been hollowed out especially for this purpose and placed in the *diggē*. (Unlike the practice at Dodanwela and Pasgama, the *kapa* was actually planted inside of the *dēvālaya* building.) While the *kapa* was being planted, the *kapurāla* remained completely shrouded in white linen. As he ceremoniously planted the *kapa*, we were all instructed to look away from him.

> Although I was unaware of it at the time, the *kapurāla* himself was prohibited from looking directly at the *jak* stem when implanting it. Rather, he focused his glance upon *kävum* (oil cakes) and *kiri bat* (milk rice) which had been placed nearby and, I was later told, serve as symbols of the wealth and fertility to be gained from conducting a successful *perahära* season. Once the *jak* had been planted as the newly installed *kapa*, the *kapurāla* quietly left the premises and the simple rite was concluded.

The symbolism of the *kapa* becomes even more apparent during the first 5 days of the 10-day village *perahära* observance known as *kumbha perahära*. On these evenings in Vegiriya, the *kapurāla* takes young coconut flowers, wraps them in white linen, and together with the *ran āyudha* ("golden weapon" of Nātha), circumambulates the *kapa* three times in a small *perahära*. Here the twin themes of prosperity and "righteous rule" or protection are symbolized. After their ritual use, the flowers are put under the rock behind the sanctum sanctorum, where the Vegiriya images of Nātha and Biso Baṇḍāra (see Plates 24 and 25) are housed. Some of the villagers believe that the tree from which these young coconut flowers were taken will bear extraordinarily abundant amounts of fruit that year. This belief is consistent with similar notions connected to Alut Sāl *mangālyaya* when new rice taken from the Daḷadā Māligāva's *kheta* (field) near Gurudeniya is consecrated at the Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy and then distributed to the village *dēvālaya*s before eventually being sprinkled in the *dēvālaya*'s fields, where it is considered to be especially charged with fertility. Moreover, when the *kapa* itself is thrown into the river at the *perahära's* concluding "water-cutting" ceremony, the water that comes into contact with the *kapa* is considered especially life-giving.

That the *kap* are taken from the lactiferous *jak* tree (the milk of which is used to bathe Śrī Mahābodhi in Anuradhapura and certain *dāgäba*s on other occasions), and that the *jak* must be virginal and treated with prohibitionary restrictions to protect its purity all would seem to indicate that the *kapa,* Indra's *khila,* is a symbol of fertility and prosperity. H. L. Seneviratne has gone so far as to say that "as the *kap* poles are obtained from 'male' trees, they might also be interpreted as phallic symbols, the lactescence being suggestive of semen" [73–75]. Of complementary symbolic importance is the circumambulation of the *kapa* by the *kapurāla* holding the the *ran āyudha* ("golden weapon" of the god), an action that marks off that specific area as being charged with sacral power. In effect, this ritual act symbolically establishes the center, or the *axis mundi* from which Nātha's sacral *laukika*-oriented power will then be distributed throughout the village and the *dēvālaya*'s domain.

Following 5 days of *kumbha perahära*, the 5 days of *rāṇḍoli perahära* are

then observed. While the first 5-day ritual period establishes the presence of sacrality and consequential fertility and prosperity, the second 5-day period is concerned more specifically with "righteous conquest," although, as we shall see, the fertility motif continues to come into play. While the celebrations of the 5 days of *kumbha perahära* at Pasgama, Dodanvela, and Vegiriya are very similar, there are some minor variations between the manner in which the 5-day *rāṇḍoli perahäras* are celebrated at each. In the description that follows, I will describe the general features of *rāṇḍoli* observed at each village *dēvālaya*, but also will note important differences where appropriate.

In Kandyan times, *rāṇḍoli* ("golden palanquin") symbolically referred to the king's chief queen as opposed to *yakaḍa ḍoli* ("iron palanquin"), used as a reference to other females in the royal harem [Seneviratne: 176, n. 11]. In the *perahära* context today, *rāṇḍoli* refers to the palanquin that carries the vessels, insignia, and "weapons" of the god. Each *dēvālaya* maintains a *rāṇḍoli*, which is locked up in its anteroom during the year and taken out only to become the focus of ritual attention during the last 5 days of *perahära* processions. Hence, the name: *rāṇḍoli perahära*. Because the *rāṇḍoli* contains the "weapons" of the *dēvālaya* deity (in this case Nātha), it is a clear symbol of divine power. However, its original significance seems to have been more directly linked to femininity and fertility. Coomaraswamy, in describing the *rāṇḍoli* segment of the traditional Kandy *perahära*, remarks that the *rāṇḍolis* of each *dēvālaya* "were accompanied not only by the women of the temple but by the court ladies and wives and daughters of the chiefs" [39]. Knox also noted:

> Next after the Gods and their Attendance go Some Thousands of Ladies and Gentelwomen, such as are the best sort of Inhabitants of the Land, arrayed in the bravest manner that their Ability can afford, and so go hand in hand three in a row: at which time all the Beauties of Zelone in their Bravery do go to attend upon their Gods in their progress about the City [79].

Davy [129–30] also makes a point of stressing the attendance of young women in the *dēvālaya* contingents of the Kandy *perahära*. (Today, however, a conspicuous contingent of women attends only the Pattinī *dēvālaya*'s section of the procession, although female troupes of Kandyan dancers may also be found in the contingents of other *dēvālayas*.) The predominant presence of women in the procession therefore continues the accent upon fertility.

During *rāṇḍoli perahära* in the three Kandyan villages where Nātha *dēvālayas* are located, the *kapurāla* and his attendants begin preparations late in the afternoon. Before the first night of *rāṇḍoli perahära*, another ritual washing (*nānumura*) of the Nātha image takes place. Water from the previous year's "water-cutting" ceremony is mixed with coconut milk and heated to a

warm temperature by the *murutan kapurāla*. Mashed lemon nuts are then mixed in. Four young coconut flowers are dipped in the mixture, and the elaborate mime of washing the Nātha image then takes place in the same manner enacted during the New Year's rites. The *ran āyudha* ("golden weapon") is then ritually touched by the *kapurāla,* whose hands have been dipped in the mixture (recalling the royal practice at the Nātha *dēvālaya* in Kandy), and waved vertically in front of the image three times. The *kapurāla* at the Vegiriya Nātha *Dēvālaya* says that this is done to show Nātha that his weapon is ready for use. The flowers are then placed under the rock abutting the *dēvālaya,* "where no people will tread upon them." Then, the weapons, aside from the "golden weapon," are placed inside the *rāṇḍoli* and are ready for the procession through the village. But before proceeding from the *diggē* through the village, three coconut oil lamps are lit and placed at the doorway leading into the sanctum sanctorum. The *kapurāla,* shrouded in linen with his face completely covered, takes the "golden weapon" in hand and waves it another three times, saying: "Light has now been provided." According to the *kapurāla,* this last procedure was performed by a village virgin "in ancient times."

During *kumbha perahära,* only a small group of people (generally those owing *rājakāriya* service) attend the ritual. But during the 5 days of *rāṇḍoli perahära,* the population of these villages swells and the crowds number about 5,000 people. Policemen need to be hired to maintain order, the best drummers in the region need to be recruited, local dance troupes must be invited to perform, and as many elephants as the occasion warrants and the *dēvālaya* can afford (eight at Pasgama, five at Dodanwela in 1984) need to be retained. Each of the *basnāyake nilamē*s at the three village *dēvālaya*s states that as the expenses for the annual *perahära* mount every year, it is becoming increasingly difficult to muster the resources of the *dēvālaya*s to meet the demands for pageantry. It has also become the custom for the endowed village Nātha *dēvālaya*s to provide for the participation of the nearby unendowed Pattinī *dēvālaya*s (in the case of Dodanwela and Vegiriya) or for the Däḍimunda *Dēvālaya* (at Pasgama).

The *rāṇḍoli* processions at Pasgama are headed, as is the Kandy *perahära,* by a dwarf cracking a whip. The cracking of the whip at the head of a procession derives from a medieval practice associated with the *disāva*s and *raṭēmahātmaya*s, whose presence and power were traditionally announced in villages in this very same fashion [Knox]. This practice is not found at Vegiriya and Dodanvela, where standard-bearers form the processions' head. The flag-bearers are accompanied by torchbearers followed in turn by drummers, Kandyan dance troupes, the *rāṇḍoli,* the elephant (the *vahana* or vehicle of Indra) bearing the *kapurāla* and the "golden weapon" of Nātha, other

elephants including those bearing the insignia of Pattinī or Däḍimunda, and finally the *basnāyake nilamē,* whose regal presence forms the conclusion of the procession. (In Kandyan times, the king often participated in the Kandy *perahära,* "being drawn in a golden chariot by eight white horses" [Coomaraswamy, 39]). The presence of the nobly adorned *basnāyake nilamē* is a reminder of the royal and divine power ultimately responsible for order and power.

The *rāṇḍoli perahära* proceeds from the *dēvālaya* through the main street to a small shrine located on the opposite end of the village. This small shrine, known as the *rittāge,* contains a *sinhāsana* ("seat of the lion"), a clear reference to a royal throne. The *rittāge* is located on elevated ground and commands the best view of the oncoming *perahära.* What takes place at the *rittage*s in Pasgama and Dodanwela is similar during the first 4 nights of the *rāṇḍoli perahära.* The processions simply circumambulate the "lion throne" three times and return down the main street to the *dēvālaya* compound. On the last night at Dodanvela, the *kapurāla* dismounts from his elephant, places the "golden weapon" on the "lion throne," offers his *yātikāva,* recounting the great past deeds of the deity, and entreats divine intervention for all people gathered. At Pasgama, the public *yātikāva* is not offered until *after* the "water-cutting" ceremony on the following morning. At Vegiriya, however, a different procedure is followed. Every night during *rāṇḍoli perahära,* the shrouded *kapurāla,* after the three circumambulations, dismounts from his elephant and places the "golden weapon" inside the *rittage* on the "lion throne." Troupes of dancers or talented soloists perform in front of Nātha "for the god's entertainment." On the final night of *rāṇḍoli,* the dancing climaxes in a wild frenzy amid the presence of a huge, enthusiastic throng. Following the dancing, the "golden weapon" is retrieved and the procession returns to the *dēvālaya.* Preparations then begin for the procession to the "water-cutting" site.

The symbolism of the processions to the *rittage* and the placement of the "golden weapon" on the "lion throne" is extraordinarily rich. We have already noted how the procession itself symbolizes the coming of a storm replete with thunder and lightning. It is, therefore, clearly about rainmaking. Since those owing *rājakāriya* service make up the social constituency of the procession, all of the various castes present in the village participate. *Rāṇḍoli perahära* is clearly a formal statement of the village's social hierarchy as well. Then, the inclusion of the *ran āyudha* ("golden weapon") as the symbolic centerpiece of the procession represents a divine act of "capturing," or a securing of order. Its placement on the *sinhāsana* ("lion throne") within the *rittāge* is also highly suggestive of the fertility season and prosperity. In fact, the term *rittāge* may be associated with Sinhala *ṛtu gṛha,* meaning "season house." By extension, it could also be connected to Sanskrit *ṛtviya:* a woman

during the favorable period of procreation.[8] If this is so, then the *rittäge* is actually the house of the goddess who is now "in season," and the presence of the male deity's "weapon" on the "lion throne" represents the union of the god with the goddess to create and recreate order and prosperity in the world.

At each of the three village *dēvālayas*, the processions to nearby rivers for the "water-cutting" rite, which forms the conclusion to the festivities, begin at about 2:00 in the morning on the last night of *rāṇḍoli* and arrive at their destinations at about 4:00 A.M. Very few people, aside from those attending to *rājakāriya* duties, join in this procession. Only one elephant, carrying the *kapurāla* and the *ran āyudha*, proceeds along the path. Upon arrival at the auspicious ferry, the *rāṇḍoli* is placed on the shore and attendants draw up a white linen cloth around the *rāṇḍoli* to prevent anyone from observing. The *kapurāla*, who has now also become enshrouded, alights on a raft accompanied by attendants carrying a torch, another carrying seeds of rice to be planted in the *dēvālaya*'s fields during the next planting season, another carrying an umbrella, a *dhobi* (washerman) who carries a canopy, and another man poling the raft. Drumming continues on the shore while the actual "water cutting" takes place. First the *kapurāla* empties the *rankale* ("golden pitcher") of water, which contained the water collected at the previous year's "water-cutting" rite. Then the *kapurāla*, with the "golden pitcher" in hand, draws the *aṭamagala* ("eight-cornered") diagram on the running river water. He then proceeds to strike at the water with the "golden weapon" (the actual "water cutting") and proceeds to fill the "golden pitcher" with water passing at that very spot. Then the raft is poled to shore and all of the "weapons" are placed inside the *rāṇḍoli*, which again has been enshrouded with linen. When the *kapurāla* is ready, he again chants his *yātikāva* and applies a *tilak* (mark) of sandalwood powder mixed with the newly "captured" water on the foreheads of all those attending. At Pasgama, this is not done until the procession has returned to the *rittäge*. The party then proceeds on the path back to the *dēvālaya*, arriving in the village at about sunrise.

The symbolism of the "water-cutting" rite recalls the central action in the myth of Indra's release of life-giving waters. Godakumbura [1970] writes: "The 'water-cutting' (*diya-käpuma*) at the end of the Perahara is the most important event in the series. It is the dramatization of the slaying of the serpent (Ahi) by striking waters with Indra's weapon, the thunderbolt, and releasing the waters for the benefit of mankind" [112]. Seneviratne also specifically comments upon the symbolism of "water cutting":

> Myths about the Perahära that are extant among the Sinhalese Buddhists fit both the warlike character of the Perahära and the fertility meanings. One such myth refers to water-cutting as a commemoration of Vishṇu's washing his sword in the river waters after the victory of the gods over the Asura [*sic*]. Another refers

> to the water-cutting as commemorative of King Gājabāhu's walk across the sea to fight the Chola king, one of his generals having parted the waters of the ocean with a blow of his iron rod. A third myth refers to the Perahära as a commemoration of the victory of Indra (king of the gods and rain god) over the demon-monster Vṛta, who was blocking the waters of the river. This is particularly suggestive since droughts are a blocking of water and in this myth it is the rain god Indra who fights against the water-blockade and is victorious [111].

Both Godakumbura and Seneviratne, in describing the symbolism of the "water-cutting" rite as it pertains to the Kandy *perahära,* seek to interpret the significance of the king's role in the rites by referring to his parallel symbolism with Indra. While their arguments are compelling, it should be noted that in the village context, at least those villages where Nātha *dēvālaya*s are located, it is Nātha who is heir to this mythology, for it is *his* "golden weapon" paraded in the *perahära* that is used to strike the water. That is, it is Nātha who "becomes Indra" in the village proceedings and secures the life-giving waters. In traditional Kandyan times, it was Nātha's power, as expressed within the *dēvālaya* rites and through the administration of the king's representative (the *basnāyake nilamē*) that was responsible for securing order in the village.

The "water-cutting" sites for each of the Nātha *dēvālaya*s are regarded as very sacred and are shared with other *dēvālaya*s in their respective locales. The "water-cutting" site for Pasgama is shared with the Hanguranketa Viṣṇu and Pattinī *Dēvālaya*s, while the Vegiriya Nātha *Dēvālaya* shares its site, Kahata Pitiye, with Ambekke, Lankatilaka, Ganegoda, and Valahagoda. A significant myth of origins is connected with this particular site, further reflecting the themes of purity and prosperity. Anuradha Seneviratna has recorded several versions of this myth, the core of which I relate as follows.

From the fruit of a large *beli* tree in Beligala Vihāraya near Kegalle, a beautiful girl was born to the sound of thunder. Accordingly, she was given the name Henakande Biso Baṇḍāra. Brought up by the elders of her village, she moved to Udanuwara in the vicinity of Ambekke and Vegiriya *dēvālaya*s. She either married King Vikramabāhu III of Gampola and died from being strangled by Skanda (Kataragama Dēviyō), who had wished to make her one of her goddesses; had an unwilling affair with Skanda, who then struck her dead with the *kapa* of the Vegiriya *dēvālaya* (according to the one version that I collected); married a Kotmale noble and died shortly after the nobleman's death; or simply died after living a life of charity and miracles. As diverse as these oral versions appear, they all agree that after her death, her corpse was placed in a *kahaṭa* log and floated down the river to be found at the place that is now the "water-cutting" site for the Vegiriya Nātha *dēvālaya.* She is now locally worshipped as a boon-conferring goddess revered for her chastity and

devotion at a small *dēvālaya* said to contain her ashes at Gangatilaka Vihāraya and at another *dēvālaya* within the Ambekke *Dēvālaya* compound. According to the *kapurāla* at the Vegiriya *dēvālaya, pūjās* during the *perahära* season commence at the five *dēvālayas* sharing this "water-cutting" site once a member of the Kahata Pitiye village offers incense in honor of Henakande Biso Baṇḍāra at the Ambekke *Dēvālaya.*

Analytical Summary of the Perahära's Significance

In reviewing the rites and symbols constitutive of the *perahära* festivities conducted at village Nātha *dēvālayas*, two major themes, aside from the obvious devotion manifest by participants, consistently reappear. The first theme concerns purity and fertility, which are expressed repeatedly in connection with the perceived propensity of the celebration to magically produce rain. The importance of securing adequate water in an agrarian-based culture is too obvious to require further explication. The symbolism attached to Indra's *kapa,* the "rainmaking" symbolism of the procession itself, and the concluding "water-cutting" ceremony are all ostensibly conducted with this primary aim in mind. That is, the entire *perahära* ritual complex is dramatically sympathetic magic aimed at securing the collective well-being of the village (and the country as a whole) through enlisting the powerful assistance of the gods (and the Buddha's "tooth relic") to produce life-giving water for the sustenance of crops.

The second theme concerns conquest and capture or, better, the insurance of order. This is seen not only in those rites concerned with the taking of the *kapa,* its subsequent circumambulation (capture) during *kumbha perahära,* and the capturing of water during the "water-cutting" ceremony but also in the conspicuous importance accorded to the *ran āyudha* ("golden weapon") during *rāṇḍoli perahära.* Paraded on an elephant by an enshrouded *kapurāla* and placed upon a thrice-circumambulated *sinhāsana* ("lion throne") within a *rittage* ("season house"), Nātha's "golden weapon" symbolizes divinely sanctioned royal potency, which, together with the purity and fertility of the "goddess,"insures the social, political, and natural orders for the welfare of the villages. *Rāṇḍoli perahära* is thus a symbolic expression on a local level of the same principles of power operative in the capital city of Kandy. Given the presence and importance of the *basnāyake nilamē,* an aristocratic noble and traditionally appointed outsider whose status derives from the power structures of Kandy (a fact underscored by his own required status-defining participation in the Kandy Äsaḷa *perahära*), and given the conspicuously emphasized presence of Nātha's "golden weapon" during *rāṇḍoli,* the confla-

tion of divine and royal power is theatrically impressed upon the observant villager. Nātha's chief *dēvālaya* is also regarded as the source of the sacral power enshrined in the local village Nātha *dēvālaya*s (a fact underscored by the required participation of the village Nātha *dēvālaya kapurāla* in the Nātha contingent of the Kandy *perahära*). The locally conducted village *perahära*s, therefore, are not only symbolic replications of the principles of power undergirding the kingdom's sovereignty, but they ritually integrate the village into the kingdom's power structures. In discussing the Alut Avurudda, Alut Sāl, and Kärtti *mangālyaya*s and the role of the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya* as a ceremonial center and *axis mundi,* we noted the symbolism of power and its centrifugal distribution to the 64 sacred places of the kingdom. During the village *kumbha* and *rāṇḍoli perahära*s, that symbolism is also graphically apparent. The procession through the village with the "golden weapon" caparisoned on an elephant is a symbolic "capture" of the village. The placement of Nātha's "golden weapon" on the "lion throne" symbolically acknowledges divine sanction and support of royal powers, or, more accurately, *rāṇḍoli perahära* defines the power of the state, which secures order on the local level. In short, local *perahära*s, in addition to their ostensible aim of producing rain, also constitute climactic symbolic expressions of conflated royal and divine power. That is, they constitute a local acknowledgment, at least in traditional Kandyan times, of the state power that insures order.

If the local celebrations of the four major annual festivals are expressive of the "power of the center" as it is centrifugally radiated throughout the kingdom, then the Kandy Äsaḷa *perahära,* in addition to its obvious rainmaking pretensions, is an expression of state power as it has been centripetally consolidated. This becomes especially apparent when it is recalled that the *basnāyake nilamē*s and *kapurāla*s of the local *dēvālaya*s are required to take up positions in the national procession. Their participation in ranked order confirms their socioreligious and political positions within the collective whole.

This feature of ritual participation, I would stress, was not merely symbolic. Both Knox and Davy report that the occasion of the annual *perahära* in Kandy provided the king with an opportunity to instill discipline in his national administration or network of political power. The king not only symbolically "captured" Kandy through the act of circumambulating the city during *rāṇḍoli perahära,* a point lucidly made by Seneviratne [85], but he literally instilled disciplined order within his administrative and military ranks. Davy writes:

> The Perraherra [*sic*] had a more secret object—by obliging all the chiefs, and the principal people of all the Dissavaonies [*sic*] and Ratties [*sic*] to appear before their sovereign in the capital at the same time, to take part in a pompous

> religious ceremony, besides tending to excite national feeling and union, of keeping the ambitious in awe, it had the effect of promoting loyalty, and of checking rebellion; or in the case of the occurrence of symptoms of rebellion, it afforded the opportunity of apprehending the suspected, and of punishing the disaffected—an opportunity that the late king, in terrible manner, availed himself [132].

Knox notes: "To see the [gods] which, also to shew themselves in their Bravery, occasions more People to resort hither, than otherwise their Zeal and Devotion would prompt them to do" [80; brackets mine]. Knox also notes that in 1664 Rājasinha II would not permit the *perahära* to be performed and "that same year the Rebellion happened, but never since has he hindered it" [80]. Apparently, at that time Rājasinha could not muster the strength to discipline his troops. He therefore suspended the *perahära*. It is very interesting here to note that a rebellion did, in fact, occur in the year in which he did not hold the *perahära*.

As Seneviratne has pointed out, the various sections constituting the Kandy *perahära* processions collectively "illustrate its microcosmic representation of all the salient features of Kandyan society" [108]. Specifically, all of the major departments of traditional Kandyan government, the *disāva*s of the 12 districts, the *raṭēmahātmaya*s of the Kandyan district, the *basnāyake nilamē*s and *kapurāla*s of the *dēvālaya*s included with the traditional 64 sacred places, and the officials of the *Daḷadā Māligāva* participated in the procession. Caste status was also expressed in the fact that all participants, from the *radala* nobles to the lower castes performing menial tasks, were seen publicly carrying their symbols and wearing appropriate apparel while taking up their respective positions. According to Seneviratne: "This effervescent enactment was a validation of the existing hierarchical order" [112]. That is, the Äsaḷa *perahära* in Kandy was the annual occasion during which representatives from all the primary stations of socioreligious power (excluding the *sangha*) and representatives from all social ranks converged on the capital to take up their places as defined in a ritual expressing the vicissitudes of divinely sanctioned state power and social hierarchy. It is within the Äsaḷa *perahära* that they dramatized the structure of what Geertz refers to as the "theatre-state." Collectively, they dramatized "a model, a paragon, a faultless image of civilized existence," to use Geertz's terminology again. And given the expediency attached to participation in the rite, this drama was "paradigmatic, not merely reflective, of social order." With regard to the village *perahära*s, whose sponsorship ultimately derived from the land grants and appointments adjudicated by the king, and whose symbolism was derived in large measure from the royally sponsored Äsaḷa *perahära*, it would seem that

their raison d'être can be found in the effort of the court to shape "the world around it into at least a rough approximation of its own excellence."

In summary, the *perahära* ritual complex was of a hybrid nature. Concomitantly, it enacted the ancient royal custom of securing fertility (rain) through the dramatic articulation of sympathetic magic while it also affirmed the traditional order of divine, social, economic, and political hierarchy.

Within these rites, we observe Nātha as an instrument of *laukika* power: as legitimator of the Kandyan kingdom on the national level an as the rector and conquistador of hierarchical power on the local village level. There is little in these rites indicating his *lōkōttara* orientation, save his designation as the next Buddha implied in his *perahära* positioning following the *Daḷadā* (symbolizing the Buddha) contingent. That is, throughout the *perahära* proceedings, Nātha's power is incorporated for thoroughly this-worldly purposes. Ironically, the Daḷadā, the symbol of the Buddha and therefore of intrinsic *lōkōttara* significance, has been put to the same use. And with its eighteenth-century inclusion, it has become the centripetal force of cultural consolidation.

8

Nātha and the "Rock Chief"

Symbolic rites of expressing Nātha's *laukika* power also take place at the other two Nātha *dēvālaya*s that lie within the pale of the old Kandyan kingdom but outside the Kandy District proper. Hunapahura (also known as Sunulapawra) Nātha *Dēvālaya* and Urulevatte Nātha *Dēvālaya* are located about 10 miles northwest of Matale and 15 miles northeast of Kurunegala within 1 mile of each other by road and within only 400 meters as the crows flies. Both *dēvālaya*s are situated in caves on a huge rock precipice known as Naugala, which dominates the topography of the surrounding area.

Like Dodanvela, Vegiriya, and Pasgama, the villages at the base of Naugala are decidedly rural and traditional. Indeed, this particular region is even more isolated from the urban centers than the locations of the other village Nātha *dēvālaya*s. Situated in a mountainous setting, the region is completely bypassed by the major trunk highways leading north out of Matale to Dambulla and northeast out of Kurunegala to Dambulla. Rice, tobacco, and vegetable farming form the bases of the local economy, in addition to a small tea plantation that has seen much more productive days. Most of the villagers engage in agriculture, but some commute to Matale and a few to Kandy.

This particular region once formed part of the southernmost extremity of the *rāja raṭa* (literally: "the king's country"—referring to the traditional Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva kingdoms). There is an ancient Brahmi inscription found at the Hunapahura Nātha *Dēvālaya* testifying to the fact that the caves that now constitute a *budumadura* and the *dēvālaya* were once used by Theravāda *bhikkhu*s as hermitages.

Both *dēvālaya*s, served by the same *kapurāla* and frequented by the same village clientele, are cave temples. Few people in Kandy, only an hour and a half away, are aware of the existence of these remote *dēvālaya*s. Certainly no one in the villages where the other Nātha *dēvālaya*s are located knows of

them. I learned of their existence through a resident *bhikkhu* at the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya*.

The *budumadura* at Hunapahura was rehabilitated during the reign of Kīrtti Śrī, and it seems likely that the stone wall built to separate it from the Nātha *dēvālaya* was built at about the same time. The *budumadura* contains splendid examples of late medieval Kandyan painting, which cover its interior entirely. As with many other shrines dating from that time, the paintings consist mainly of illustrations of the 24 buddhas and scenes from the *Vessantara Jātaka*. The central image of the Buddha is typical of late-eighteenth-century Kandyan style. The great beauty of the *budumadura* stands in sharp contrast to the stark character of the adjacent Nātha *dēvālaya*. But inside the *dēvālaya* side of the cave, there is a magnificent 9-foot standing statue of Nātha, carved out of the wood from the Nā tree (see Plate 28) and attributed by the *kapurāla* and villagers to Sapumal Kumāra (Bhuvanekabāhu VI, 1470–1478; see pp. 91–93). A small *vihāraya* is located some 60 stone steps down the cliff from the *budumadura* and the *dēvālaya*. A huge Nā tree from which Sapumal is said to have heard the auspicious sounds of a lizard still stands, according to local oral tradition, juxtaposed to the *dēvālaya*. While the *vihāraya*'s *sannasa* (historical record of endowment) indicates that the *vihāraya* (and hence the repair of the *budumadura*) was endowed by Kīrtti Śrī, it is totally silent with regard to the *dēvālaya*. The *dēvālaya* remains unendowed today.

Local villagers and the *kapurāla* believe that the Hunapahura Nātha *Dēvālaya* was first consecrated by King Welagambha (Vaṭṭagāmaṇī Abhaya, 103–102, 89–77 B.C.) and connect its founding with the simultaneous legendary consecration of the famous Dambulla caves located some 25 miles to the northeast. Most cave temples located within both the *rāja raṭa* and the old kingdom of Kandy have a similar claim made for them. But what is particularly interesting about this specific *dēvālaya* is that, according to the villagers and the *kapurāla*, it was at one time actually endowed by a Kandyan king, whose name (Kīrtti Śrī) they have now forgotten. They say that a subsequent king (Rājādhi Rājasinha?), whose name they have also forgotten, wanted to take the *dēvālaya*'s Nātha image away from the site in order to enshrine it in Kandy but was refused the cooperation of a brave *kapurāla*, who dared to defy him. According to them, when the king sent his men to forcibly remove the image from the *dēvālaya* and take it to Kandy, they were attacked by swarms of bees and broke out with rashes. (We have previously noted this motif in connection with the Dodanvela *dēvālaya*.) As punishment, the king revoked the *dēvālaya*'s endowment. Since that time, according to the *kapurāla* and the villagers, the *dēvālaya* has been cared for solely by the local inhabitants. (A check with the local monastic incumbent confirmed that the *vihāraya* does not provide any funds for the *dēvālaya*'s maintenance. Moreover, the key to the

dēvālaya door remains in the possession of the *kapurāla*.) While it is impossible to correlate the "facts" of this local oral tradition with historical "facts," the story does reflect a perceived historical break with Kandyan traditions, a fact graphically apparently, as we shall see, in our discussion of the *dēvālaya*'s ritual proceedings. Indeed, what transpires ritually at these two *dēvālayas* is unique to the cult of Nātha and has developed quite independently of the system of ritual we observed in Chapter 7. This break with Kandyan ritual traditions may also have some bearing on why the wall was built to separate the *budumadura* from the *dēvālaya*.

Through a translation of an old *talapot sannasa*,[1] it is possible to be more precise with regard to the traditional background ascribed to the nearby Urulevatte Nātha *Dēvālaya*. According to this text, Urulevatte village descends from a certain Herat Baṇḍāra, who came from "*cetiya raṭa Dantapura* of *Ayodhya Deśa* in *Dambadīva*" ("the stupa country of Dantapura—city of the Tooth Relic—in the Ayodhya region of India") with a certain Sigiri Baṇḍāra and 40,000 people. Villagers believe that their ancestors originally came from northern India with the mythical Vijaya's earliest Aryan settlers. The *sannasa* states that the buddha icon and the Nātha Dēva *rūpa* in the *dēvālaya piḷimagē* were constructed by the efforts of a pious Buddhist *bhikkhu*, known as one Attadāsi, who supervised the *netra pinkama* (celebration of the painting of the eyes of the icon, the act that consecrates the image)[2] in 2326 of the Buddhist era (A.D. 1783). The *sannasa* then records the various endowments given to the *dēvālaya* by past local and regional dignitaries. It cites making merit and its transfer to village ancestors as the chief reason for these donations. But King Rājādhi Rājasinha (1781–1798) is also listed as having been the main benefactor for the *dēvālaya*'s endowment. The *dēvālaya* proper is really a *lena piḷimagē* (a cave temple with images of the Buddha and the gods). As one enters, to the left is found an icon of Nātha behind a glass case (see Plate 29). It stands about 4 feet in height. Straight ahead is a much smaller Kandyan buddha in the *samādhi* position.

That these two Nātha *dēvālaya*s exist in such close proximity, that they are served by the same *kapurāla*, and that they are patronized, by the same villagers all tend to support local oral traditions regarding the respective statuses of their *dēvālaya*s. Since Kīrtti Śrī restored the *budumadura* abutting the Hunapahura Nātha *Dēvālaya*, he may, in fact, have been the king who originally endowed the *dēvālaya*. His successor, Rājādhi Rājasinha, may have been the king who severed his support of the *dēvālaya* when he was refused its image. This scenario makes some sense in light of the fact that Rājādhi Rājasinha endowed the founding of Urulevatte Nātha *Dēvālaya* in 1783, locating it merely 400 yards to the southeast on the face of Naugala. This scenario therefore might be the explanation as to why there should be two

Nātha *dēvālaya*s located in such close proximity in such a remote location. While the Hunapahura *dēvālaya* remains unendowed, villagers and the *kapurāla* insist upon the sanctity of both and claim that the Hunapahura Nātha *Dēvālaya* is the oldest sacred structure in the area.

A Case of Possession at the Annual *Mangālyaya*

Ritual life is quite irregular at the Hunapahura and Urulevatte Nātha *Dēvālaya*s. Kemmara days are not observed consistently, and if a villager wants the *kapurāla* to petition Nātha for any reason, he makes his request known ahead of time and specifies at which *dēvālaya* he would like the *yātikāva* chanted. Villagers request the mediation of the *kapurāla* for basically the same *laukika* reasons found at other Nātha *dēvālaya*s: protection from thieves, successful cultivation, the restoration of health, etc. The *kapurāla* states that "Nātha is in charge of this area." Indeed, a landmark tree at the south side of the village demarcates Nātha's "turf" from that of Pattinī's and Ridigama Dēviyō's, but the *kapurāla* is quick to stress that everyone in the village believes that Nātha is the future Buddha Maitrī and that his fame is widespread. (To prove his point, he introduced me to several relations who had come from Polonnaruva for the annual *mangālyaya*.)

The annual *mangālyaya* is but the one public ritual observance held each year. Here, the *mangālyaya* is simply referred to as the *murutan* and the *nānumura*. The site of the ritual alternates on a yearly basis between the two *dēvālaya*s and is held on the new moon in either June or July. In 1984, the festival was held at the Urulevatte Nātha *Dēvālaya* on the night of July 4 and the morning of July 5, the precise times being determined astrologically some weeks in advance.

Since *murutan* is offered but once a year, the *kapurāla* and his assistants take great care in its preparation. They are completely preoccupied with the task for 3 or 4 days preceding the rite. Even though the Urulevatte Nātha *Dēvālaya* was endowed with land in the late eighteenth century, no *rājakāriya* responsibilities were specifically assigned. Thus, the *kapurāla,* whose family has been in charge of both *dēvālaya*s for as long as any of the villagers can remember, must personally superintend all of the detailed preparations. About 1 week before the *mangālyaya,* the *kapurāla* goes into the village and solicits rice, "golden pingo," red bananas, coconuts, nuts, and vegetables. The villagers donate these foods because they believe that it will lead to their own prosperity during the year. When the rice is collected, it is divided into two piles. One amount is ground into flour and used to make oil cakes. The rest of the rice is cooked and served with curries as part of the *murutan*. Three

different types of curries are prepared: *māluva* (vegetable), *hat māluva* (seven types of vegetables), and *vaṭṭakkā* (pumpkin sauce). Nothing is cooked with salt. Besides the portions of rice and curry and oil cakes that are served to the gods, *goṭu* (packets made of *jak* or banana leaves filled with rice and curry and a sweet) are prepared for the *yakkhas*. In preparation for the *nānumura,* nuts are soaked in warm water during the preceding night.

At about 5:00 A.M., the *kapurāla* and his five attendants, who have spent the night at the *dēvālaya* following the food preparations of the previous evening, enter the *dēvālaya* with the soaking nuts and a vessel containing coconut oil. All six have their mouths covered by areca nut leaves, which they have tied at the napes of their necks. The five attendants wash the entire floor of the interior with coconut oil and sprinkle sandalwood powder to perfume the chamber. The *kapurāla* performs the elaborate *nānumura* mime with a mirror as previously described. (His attendants reported afterward that the *kapurāla* had lost consciousness for about 15 minutes during the ritual.) The *kapurāla* and his attendants finally come out of the closed *dēvālaya* at about 6:30 A.M. and begin to set up the ritual ornaments for the extraordinary event that is then to occur.

Following 15 minutes of rest, the *kapurāla* and his attendants begin to place the *dēvābharana* ("ornaments of the gods") on a table covered with white linen, which has been especially constructed in the *digge.* A second table with white linen, this one canopied by an oblong lean-to structure draped in white linen, has also been placed at a right angle to the first table. The second table is referred to as the "chariot." The ornaments on the first table consist of iron and brass bangles (*halaṁba*) and weapons (*ayudha*) of two different types: machetes of the type used to cut rice stalks and a billhook. The ritual that follows is initiated by transferring the *dēvābharaṇa* from the first table to the "chariot." All the weapons, two for each of the three gods to be feted, are wrapped in white linen containing betel leaves and young areca nut flowers so that the arrangements resemble bouquets (see Plate 39).

At 8:15 A.M., after the musicians have arrived, the transfer of ornaments formally begins. To the cadence of rhythmic drumming, the *kapurāla* prostrates before the "chariot" and begins to dance—moving his arms in circular and angular motions while in a stooped posture, all the time taking stutter steps backward and forward. Taking a clay pot fashioned in the shape of a serpent, the *kapurāla* pours water into a small paint-striped clay vase containing young areca nut flowers and placed on the "chariot" in honor of Nātha. In the same fashion and continuing the dance to the syncopation of drums throughout, the *kapurāla* sprinkles the "chariot" with *handun kiripän* (sandalwood powder mixed with water and coconut milk). This is followed by an incensing of the "chariot." Three bundles of areca nut flowers are then

presented, "watered," and "incensed" before being neatly placed on the "chariot." The weapons of the three gods are then placed next to the respective bundles, followed by the bangles and "weapons" of the respective deities, all having been "watered" and "incensed." Next, three additional sheaves of betel are placed in front of the arrangement for Nātha, while two are placed before those of Ridigama Dēviyō and Gala *baṇḍāra* (the "Rock Chief"). All items are then sprinkled with water from the serpent-spouted clay pot. The areca nut flowers are then removed from the chariot and lit with a burning piece of sandalwood. Seven other sprigs of areca nut (three for Nātha and two each for Ridigama Dēviyō and Gala *baṇḍāra*) are lit and placed in semicircular fashion around the "chariot." During the 40 minutes these procedures require to complete, the *kapurāla* has been dancing continuously.

After a 5-minute pause, the drumming recommences and all of the "weapons," bangles, areca nut flowers, and betel leaves are removed from the "chariot" to the *murutan* kitchen located nearby at the ledge of the cliff upon which the *diggē* of the *dēvālaya* cave temple is located. After another brief interval, the drummer leads a small procession composed of the *kapurāla*'s assistants, carrying a white canopy under which the *kapurāla* marches with Nātha's "golden" and "silver" "weapons," into the sanctum sanctorum (see Plate 40). The procession is then repeated five times until the "weapons" of the other two deities, the rice and curries, bananas, and *tämbili* ("king coconut") have been taken into the *dēvālaya*. The *kapurāla* then closes the door to the *dēvālaya*, and a vigil by all those assembled commences. Everyone who witnesses the two preceding phases of the ritual has touched the trays of food while they were being brought into the *dēvālaya* so that they might share in the prosperity to be derived.

During the vigil, more and more people from the village begin to ascend the 200 steps leading up to the ledge of the precipice where the *dēvālaya* is located. By the time the *kapurāla* reemerges, some 350 villagers have arrived. The drumming commences immediately, and soon many other villagers appear, making the very crowded situation on the cliff's ledge somewhat treacherous. While the *kapurāla*'s attendants carry the pots that contain the rice and curries from the *dēvālaya* back to the *murutangē* (kitchen), the *kapurāla* brings the "weapons" and bangles of Nātha back to their original place on the "chariot." Without a given signal, the drummer commences a rapid syncopation, the *kapurāla* places the bangles of Nātha on his wrists and begins to quiver and then shake violently. Assisted by the crowd, he stutters back to the "chariot" and takes hold of both of Nātha's "weapons." Holding them crosswise (in the fashion of an X) in front of his chest, he careens wildly about in all directions in front of the "chariot" and is given a wide berth by the assembled throng. The drummer then drops the pace of the rhythm until the

kapurāla, whose eyes are now blazing wildly, gains a semblance of control. Then, however, the drumming gradually accelerates and the *kapurāla* begins to approach an attending Buddhist *bhikkhu* (not my research assistant). The *kapurāla*'s dance becomes increasingly frenzied in front of the *bhikkhu,* who begins to show corresponding signs of anxiety, until the drummer again slows the intensity of his beat. The *kapurāla* then slowly backs away from the monk and proceeds in the direction of the drummer, who again increases the intensity of his beat. During the next frenzied minute, the *kapurāla,* first in front of the drummer and then in front of a number of designated others, shouts, "*Mama oba ārakṣākaranavā* ("I will protect you"). Following this scene, the *kapurāla,* now more composed, proceeds to dance in front of the crowd for about 15 minutes, periodically shouting, "*Mama oba ārakṣākaranavā*" to the collective. Eventually, the *kapurāla* finds his way back to the front of the "chariot." There he begins to gesture wildly before attempting to put the "weapons" back on the "chariot." Having finally succeeded, with the assistance of his aides, he removes the bangles from his wrists and collapses into a heap as if he had become "unplugged." His violent shaking stops as soon as the bangles are removed.

Following this intensity, the crowd begins to relax while the *kapurāla* recovers. A few minutes later, the *kapurāla* offers his *yātikāva* on behalf of everyone attending. Everyone kneels in the manner of prayer. Following the chant, the *kapurāla* gives *tilak*s to everyone who has attended, and this phase of the ritual is concluded.

Following this phase, I accompanied the *kapurāla* inside of the *dēvālaya* to see the manner in which the food had been arranged. Placed into four heaps on top of banana leaves, Nātha's share was twice as great as those offered to the other deities: Ridigama Dēviyō, Gala Baṇḍāra, and Däḍimunda (who had not been represented in the "chariot) (see Plate 41).

The final phase of the ritual ends at 1:00 P.M. when the *kapurāla* quietly offers the *goṭu* made up of "inferior food" to Bahirava and other *yakkha*s. According to the *kapurāla,* this final offering is done to make sure that the *yakkha*s do not become jealous or, out of their hunger, seek to subvert the measures of protection just secured.

An Interpretation of the Annual *Mangālyaya: The Conflation of Nātha Dēviyō and Gala Baṇḍāra*

The elaborate sequence of rites just described reveals the hybrid nature that the cult of Nātha has assumed in this particular village. Many of the symbols of currency in traditional Kandyan *dēva* worship remain evident here, but it is



Plate 39. Altar prepared for Nātha Dēviyō, Gala Baṇḍāra, and Ridigama Dēviyō containing bangles, weapons, young coconut flowers, and betel leaves during the annual *mangālyaya*. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)

Plate 40. Ritual attendants march with a canopy covering the *murutän* (food offering) to be presented to the gods at Urulevatte. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)





Plate 41. Murutan offered to the gods at Urulevatte. (Photo by John Clifford Holt)

also the case that important motifs common in the traditional Vädda and Sinhala cult of the *baṇḍāra* deities have been absorbed. On the most general level, it appears that while Nātha is regarded as a "high god," that is, as one of the four national guardian deities who is destined to become the next Buddha Maitrī, the "cosmological gap" that exists between Nātha and his devotees in other Kandyan contexts has been considerably narrowed, to say the very least. The power of Nātha is not only symbolized by the presence of his "weapons," bangles, etc., but is believed to possess the *kapurāla* for the duration of his ecstatic dance. The *kapurāla* actually "becomes Nātha" once he has adorned the divine bangles and has taken up his "weapons."

In summary, this sequence of rites is divided into six phases. The first consists of the *nānumura* bathing of the Nātha icon and the purificatory washing of the *dēvālaya*. Once this ritual purification takes place, the gods are "invited" to take up their seats in the "chariot." Here they are "dressed" and provided with their weapons to make the journey to the *dēvālaya* to be fed. The double portion offered to Nātha indicates his superior status. Having been properly fed in a suitable setting, Nātha makes his "appearance" by possessing the *kapurāla* and declaring his intention to protect the *sāsana* (represented by the attending *bhikkhu*), his devotees, and the village as a whole. The *yātikāva* that the *kapurāla* then offers and the subsequent bestowal of the *tilak* represent the formal requests and confirmations of Nātha's protection. The pacification of Bahirava and his retinue of *yakkhas* not only provides additional insurance of protection but is done on behalf of village ancestors for their well-being in the netherworld. Collectively, this sequence of rites affirms the supernatural structures of power, which, for the villagers, insure order and prosperity throughout the year.

As I have noted, many of the trappings of these ritual proceedings are throughly Kandyan Sinhala Buddhist. Nātha, the god of the kingdom of Kandy par excellence, is the chief cultic object of the rites, his image has been bathed and fed according to prescriptions in force at other Kandyan Nātha *dēvālayas*, and his "weapon" remains the primary ritual symbol of attention. In addition, the rituals take place in immediate proximity to and with the apparent blessing of the neighboring Buddhist monastic *vihārayas* whose monks, by attending the rites, lend their legitimacy and implicit sanction. It gocs without saying that all of the villagers consider themselves to be Sinhala Buddhists and believe that Nātha is the next buddha. However, upon closer consideration, the deep structure of a complementary form of religious orientation becomes apparent, especially with regard to the various expressions contained in the *kapurāla*'s *yātikāva* and the *kapurāla*'s own ecstatic state of possession. In short, the cult of Nātha in this remote and peripheral region of the old kingdom of Kandy reflects another instance of the Sinhala penchant

for adaptation and assimilation. More specifically, it reflects a more popular mode of religious experience intrinsic to premodern cultures of both Sinhala and Vädda orientation.

This "premodern" mode of religious experience may also be a "pre-Buddhistic" mode. It can be found not only in many parts of Sri Lanka but in Burma and Thailand as well. Obeyesekere [1979: 201] has speculated that it may have been the dominant form of religious culture in all three countries before the process of "buddhicization" set in, for the *baṇḍāra* (literally: "chief") cult in Sri Lanka shares a high degree of affinity with the cult of the *nats* ("lords") in Burma and the cult of the *phii* (regional spirits) in Thailand. The most outstanding feature of these cults is the veneration of departed kinsmen of note who, after death, have been raised to the level of deities whose power extends over a local region, usually the same region that was actually under his political control while he acted as "chief" in his lifetime. The Sinhala cult of the *baṇḍāras*, which symbolically number 12 in traditional Kandyan religion (coinciding with the number of *disāvas* who ruled the Kandyan districts with the sanction of the king) seems to have resulted from euhemerism.[3] In the traditional hierarchical structures of the Kandyan divine pantheon, the *baṇḍāras*, as we have noted before, rank below the four guardian deities of the national cult who, in turn, are subservient to the Buddha, in the same manner in which *disāvas* rank beneath *adigars*, who in turn report to the king. The parallels between the political structure and the hierarchy of the pantheon have been discussed in further detail by Obeyesekere [1966: 16–21] and Winslow [1984].

Elements intrinsic to the *baṇḍāra* cult are quite evident in the preceding account of the rituals constitutive of the annual *mangālyaya*. In the myth of the origins of Urulevatte village, the *talapot sannasa* states that the first inhabitants of the village were descendents of Herat Baṇḍāra. Many villagers are convinced that Herat Baṇḍāra is now none other than Ridigama Dēviyō, the village deity of the most important village in the area (located about 8 miles to the southwest and the site of an ancient and famous Buddhist *vihāraya*). Further, the companion of Herat Baṇḍāra, Sigiri Baṇḍāra, has obvious connections to the region around the famous Sigiri ruin, a fifth-century fortress located some miles to the east of Urulevatte. In these two figures, we no doubt have a euhemeristic development.

Second, in the *kapurāla*'s public *yātikāva,* no less than four important *baṇḍāra* deities (Gange, Gala, Kaḍavara, and Kaḷukumāra)[4] are appealed to for protection in the coming year.

Finally, offerings to Bahirava[5] and the other *yakkhas* (who are sometimes thought to engage in combat with the *baṇḍāras* in the netherworlds) are also a means of assisting the ancestors in their current conditions.

More striking, however, is the case of divine possession experienced by the *kapurāla*. While the *kapurāla* and the villagers insist that it is Nātha who takes possession, it is very likely that this practice has its origins in the cult of Gala *Bandāra*, the third god who, in addition to Ridigama Dēviyō and Nātha, is honored during these annual rites. There are several compelling details that lend support to this hypothesis.

Henry Parker [1984] has provided a lucid account of religious practices in the northeastern section of the Kurunagala District (the area with which we are directly concerned, although Urulevatte is now outside the Kurunagala boundary and properly just inside the Matale District boundary) as known to him during the early part of the twentieth century. Here, he describes many aspects of the cult of Gala *bandāra*. Parker [206] believed that the Gala *bandāra* cult originally came from India as a form of venerating Rudra (proto-Śiva), that it was assimilated and adapted by the Väddas in the form of the Gala *yakā* cult, and was eventually introduced by the Väddas to the Sinhalese. Obeyesekere [1984] has noted that "it is clear that much of the Matale District that is now Sinhala was Vädda in the seventeenth century" [305]. While this last fact would tend to support Parker's hypothesis (that the Väddas introduced the cult of Gala *yakā* to the local Sinhalese), Seligmann and Seligmann [1911: 189] concluded conversely that, in fact, the cult of Gala *yakā* was probably introduced by the Sinhalese to the Väddas. In fact, there is indeed a myth connected to the origins of Gala *bandāra* that seems to suggest a Sinhala original context but also suggests the euhemeristic process of sacred valorization among the Väddas. This myth is found in the *Purāṇa Sivupāda Sangrahāva* [Pragnaloka, 1952: 44–48] and runs, in summary, as follows:

> King Bhuvanekabāhu II [1293–1302] of Kurunegala had a son named Vathimi, a child born of a Muslim woman. He was brought up in Muslim tradition with the woman's family in Beruwala. After the king had committed suicide, Prince Vathimi became the new king. He was not only partial to Muslim interests, but he brought his Muslim relations to Kurunegala and appointed some of them to high positions in the royal court in the process displacing Sinhalese ministers. During his reign, a miraculous and powerful *halamba* appeared in the Kurunegala *väva* [reservoir] and the king decided that he wanted to possess the powers of the bangle. He invited many *kapurāla*s to procure it for him, but all failed. Because of their failures, the king had them put to death. These actions created great consternation among the people and so his remaining Sinhala ministers conspired to get rid of him. They told the king that if they could perform a *pirit* ceremony on Etugala [one of the huge rocks overlooking Kurunegala] it would become possible to obtain the *halamba*. When the preparations for the *pirit* ceremony were complete, the king was summoned to take up his seat in attendance. Unsuspecting, the king sat down on his specially prepared seat which then gave way as planned. The king rolled over the cliff and

> died as the result of his fall. He was reborn as Gala *baṇḍāra/yakkha* and his power pervades the regions of Etugala, Kolalapalla, Lunugala, Andagala, Managal, Ibbaga, Hadurukkanda, Algama, Galabada,, Kotakaduwa, Polgala, Divgandahaya, Yakdessagala, and Navatagane.[6]

The story of Gala *Baṇḍāra* is in some respects similar to the mythic origins of Piṭiye. That is, an offspring of royalty is killed only to be reborn as a *baṇḍāra*-class deity. In the case of Gala *Baṇḍāra,* it is a matter of incoming Muslim power, rather than Tamil power, that is assimilated and finally domesticated. It is further interesting to recall that in the introduction, I noted that it was the Urulevatte and Hunapahura *kapurāla* whose *yātikāva* included Mecca as a holy place consecrated by a visit from the Buddha. In any case, whatever the actual origins of the Gala *Baṇḍāra* cult, the affinities between the ritual proceedings in Urulevatte that we have just described and those described by Parker are striking in their similarity, if not in coincidence. Moreover, the manner in which Vathimi died clearly explains the venue for the ritual of possession that Parker describes.

Parker reports that both the Väddas of the interior and the Kandy Sinhalese of the northeastern Kurunegala District performed an ecstatic dance once a year in which Gala *yaka* takes possession of a specially appointed dancer or *kapurāla* "in order to ward off epidemic diseases" [188]. The dance is "commonly executed under an Ironwood [Nā] tree" [188; brackets mine] or "on a high precipitous projecting crag near the top of a prominent hill" [191]. His description of the dancer is as follows: "The body is slightly bent forward, with elbows near the side, and forearms extended horizontally. In this attitude, the performer lifts up and lowers his feet alternately" [190]. The dance takes place annually in either July or August, never on a *pōya* day, at about noon, "the exact timing determined some weeks in advance, in order to allow for the necessary provisions to be collected for the offering and feast" [196–97]. The dancer puts on the garb of the god, including the *halamba,* and "takes in his right hand the ābarana [*sic*], or symbol of the deity, a Bill hook" [197]. When the dancer becomes possessed, "henceforward his actions are no longer under his control but are those of the deity" [197]. Parker further states that the *murutan* for the deity takes place after the dance (the order of which was reversed in the rite I observed). He mentions that betel leaves, areca nut flowers, the *halam̆ba,* and *āyudha* of the gods are ceremoniously placed on a *yahana* (the oblong, linen-covered altar known as the "chariot" in our rite) after being watered and "incensed." Following the offering to Gala *Baṇḍāra,* another offering is made to "all absent minor deities or demons collectively" [201]. According to Parker [202], the entire rite serves the function of appeasing all of the deities in the area.

The overwhelming similarities between Parker's account of the cult of Gala

Baṇḍāra and the rite I observed in connection with the two Nātha *dēvālayas* at Hunapahura and Urulevatte on the face of Naugala cliff would seem to lead to the unequivocal conclusion that the cult of Gala *Baṇḍāra* is the veritable inspiration for the contemporary annual *mangālyaya* held in honor of Nātha Dēviyō. The fact that Hunapahura was cut off from the centrifugal and centripetal Kandyan ritual traditions that we described in Chapter 7 would also seem to indicate that the trappings of the Gala *Baṇḍāra* cult have filled this vacuum. It also indicates that, in this particular instance, the power of Nātha Dēviyō is conceived to operate on both the level of a national guardian deity and the level of the *baṇḍāra* deities. Or while Nātha is cognitively understood to be a national guardian *dēva* as well as Maitrī-in-the-making, effectively his power is expressed ritually through the symbolic forms of the local Gala *Baṇḍāra* cult, perhaps the most idiomatic and appropriate forms for the expression of supernatural *laukika*-oriented power in this local cultural region. This seems particularly to have been the case, given the peripheral location of the two *dēvālayas*. The fact that a number of Nātha's symbols, such as the Nā tree, his "weapon," and his ability to cure diseases, have been quite easily sustained means that it is clear that the process of syncretism in this instance is quite mature.

What remains of further interest is the fact that the power of Nātha Dēviyō remains connected with religiopolitical power. In this instance, however, his power is not associated with Kandyan divine kingship but instead with the powers of local regional rule expressed euhemeristically.

At Hunapahura and Urulevatte, we see an instance wherein Nātha has assimilated attributions of power formerly ascribed to another "lesser" deity. The process resembles the same dynamic occurring at Dodanvela *dēvālaya* in which the powers of Dodanvela Dēva also have been assimilated into the cult of Nātha. The reasons for these assimilations are the very same as Nātha's own previous assimilation into Sinhala Buddhist religious culture. That is, a source of *laukika* power is perceived as efficacious and therefore incorporated. In the same way that Avalokiteśvara was incorporated by having his power related to Buddhist soteriology, here Nātha represents that very Buddhist soteriology by virtue of his identification with Maitrī.

Furthermore, the ritual dynamics of the cult of Nātha at Hunapahura and Urulevatte run counter to the assumption [Obeyesekere, 1984: 66] that Nātha has become an ever-distant and remote deity as he has moved up the ladder of hierarchy in the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon. Here, Nātha annually enters into the world to assure his devotees of his protection and concern for their well-being. In a sense, he actually has moved down "the ladder" to legitimate popular practices. In this instance, his substitution for Gala Baṇḍāra represents another example of the "buddhicization" of religion in Sinhala Sri Lanka.

9

Conclusion: Maitreya-in-the-Making

Within the context of the contemporary yet traditional Sinhala Buddhist world of up-country Kandyan villages where Nātha *dēvālaya*s can still be found, Nātha remains a focus of cultic life and a potential source of *laukika* assistance. Yet, even within these villages, he is not understood as a deity, such as Kataragama Dēviyō, with the propensity to act dramatically, passionately, or frequently for his devotees. Whenever I asked the *dēvālaya kapurāla*s to account for Nātha's removed character, they would say that Nātha was "too busy," "too good," and even in one case, too high of a caste. In their worldviews, Nātha is preoccupied with his *lōkōttara* task of becoming the future Buddha Maitrī and therefore is out of character with sorcery or revenge.

Early on in my research, it became obvious that Nātha's identity as Maitreya (Maitrī) was now his best-known attribute. This was true not only among his village devotees at the up-country *dēvālaya*s but also among Sinhala Buddhists in general throughout the low country, where almost nothing else about him is known. Ironically, I concluded, what is best known about this deity is that he is in the process of becoming someone else! It was virtually impossible to initiate any conversation about Nātha before hearing the unprompted assertion that Nātha is Maitrī. On the other hand, conversations about Maitrī rarely lead to assertions regarding his contemporary identity as Nātha. Whenever I would approach Nātha or Maitrī images in *vihāraya*s or *dēvālaya*s and ask who was represented by their icons, Nātha images were identified consistently as Maitrī but Maitrī images were never referred to as Nātha. Maitrī's identity was almost always discussed in terms relevant to the Buddha rather than Nātha, since his well-known mythic biography in the *Anāgatavaṃsa Desanā* parallels the Buddha's essentially in substance, scope,

and structure. This was primarily why most sculptural and painted depictions of Maitrī present him wearing monastic robes either seated in meditation or preaching the *dharma* in Tuṣita heaven.

Extremely little is known about Nātha at the only two low-country Nātha *dēvālaya*s in Sri Lanka, at Bellanvila (just southeast of the Colombo municipal limits) and at Telwatte (between Ambalantota and Hikkaduwa on the southwest coast). At these two *dēvālaya*s, nothing of the Kandyan oral and mythic traditions regarding Nātha's confrontation with Piṭiye is known. Nor are many aware of the existence of other Nātha *dēvālaya*s in the up-country (except for a few knowledgeable *bhikkhu*s at Bellanvila who are familiar with the main Nātha shrine in Kandy). In addition, I uncovered no other significant oral mythic traditions specifically about Nātha at these two sites, despite repeated efforts. Disappointing at first, this absence became intriguing.

The Telwatte Nātha *Dēvālaya* was (re?)built in the reign of the last Nāyakkar king of Kandy during the first decade of the nineteenth century. It is now located within the *sīma* of a monastic *vihāraya,* which purports to be on the same site as Śrī Rāhula's famous fifteenth-century Totagamuva *pirivena*. Indeed, this is its major contemporary claim to fame, a claim that its enterprising monastic incumbents hawk with enthusiasm. The actual *dēvālaya* site may be, in fact, quite ancient, owing to the presence of pillar ruins probably dating to the eighth or ninth century that abut the current Nātha *dēvālaya* building.[1] Because of Telwatte's association with Śrī Rāhula and the fact that the temple is one of the very few in the low country containing authentic paintings and sculptures from the Kandyan period,[2] the site has become something of a minor local tourist attraction. But since Obeyesekere [1984] refers to Totagamuva as "the seat of the Nātha cult" [290], one might expect to find a sacred place of pilgrimage here. This is not the case. While Totagamuva is compared to Viṣṇu's shrine at Devinuvara and Skanda's at Kataragama within the *kapurāla*'s beautifully sung *yātikāva,* there is nothing else distinctive within it to add to Nātha's mythic stratigraphy. Since Nātha remains obscure, there is no folklore to attract low-country Sinhalese to come from afar to ask the god for his timely assistance. Furthermore, there are no *rājakāriya* duties attached to the *dēvālaya,* and the same family of *kapurāla*s presides over the nearby Viṣṇu *dēvālaya* as well. Nor is there anything unique, from what I could observe, about Nātha's place in the liturgical context of *vihāraya* ritual life. The icon of Nātha in the *dēvālaya* is also quite indistinct: there is no *dhyāni* buddha in the crown.

Here, it is quite clear, then, that Nātha's cult is moribund, and it is perhaps this particular local condition that led Obeyesekere [1984: 66, n. 3] to conclude that Nātha's cult is almost dead. In reviewing field notes from several visits to Telwatte over the span of a year and a half, I have found nothing of

substance in them to differentiate the functions of and beliefs about Nātha from Viṣṇu (whose *dēvālaya* is located next to Nātha's and ritually tended by the same *kapurāla*), except the often-repeated assertion that Nātha is "Maitrī-in-the-making."

Bellanvila, the other remaining Nātha *dēvālaya* in the low country, is the most recently established Nātha *dēvālaya* in Sri Lanka and dates back only to the 1950s. The Bellanvila *Dēvālaya* and Telwatte's *dēvālaya,* unlike the *dēvālaya*s in the Kandyan area, are located within the confines of monastic *vihāraya*s. As a result, the ritual activities at both are ultimately controlled by the *vihāraya*'s chief monastic incumbents. Thus, these *dēvālaya*s lack a *basnāyake nilamē* and have no endowments of their own. It could even be asserted that the *dēvālaya*s lack a distinctive ritual life of their own. Monastic supervision may account for the fact that the local religious significance attributed to Nātha has been left chiefly to monastic interpretation and consequently that his identification with Maitrī has been the only facet of Nātha's character now stressed.

Bellanvila is an extremely interesting religious complex, being one of the largest and most important *vihāraya*s in the Colombo metropolitan area. It would be an ideal location to study what Bechert [1978] and Southwold [1983] have called "Buddhist modernism,"[3] and, in fact, has been mentioned several times in a very recent book published by Gombrich and Obeyesekere [1988] on religious change in urban Colombo during the past 25 years. In the Colombo metropolitan area, it is perhaps second only in importance to the Kelaniya Rāja Mahāvihāra, regarded as the site of the Buddha's third and last visit to Sri Lanka described in the *Mahāvaṃsa.* Bellanvila's own prestige is bolstered by the fact that the large *bodhi* tree within the *vihāraya sīma* is mentioned within the *Mahābodhivaṃsa* as one of 32 saplings grafted from Śrī Mahābodhi in Anuradhapura. During the month of Äsaḷa, when Kandy is celebrating its famous *perahära,* Bellanvila sponsors one of its own, rivaling the size of the other two major Colombo *perahära*s at Kelaniya and Gangārāma.

In 1981, Bellanvila initiated an extensive social service program that includes an ambitious vocational training institute with the aim of providing technical education to unemployed villagers hoping to find a livelihood in the Colombo area. Some of Bellanvila's *bhikkhu*s are among the best educated in Sri Lanka, while others hold influential positions on island-wide *sangha* committees and are very active in national political discussions.

The religious complex at Bellanvila is very impressive by local standards. In addition to a large, immaculately maintained *dāgäba,* a beautifully appointed *dharmasāla* (preaching hall), and luxurious living accommodations for its monks, seven *dēvālaya*s surround the massive *bodhi* tree, the largest

number of *dēvālaya*s within a *vihāraya sīma* (that I am aware of) in Sri Lanka. In addition to Nātha, the *dēvālaya*s are dedicated to Īśvara (Śiva), Viṣṇu, Vibhīṣana, Pattinī, Kataragama, and Hūniyam. The selection of these deities did not take place at random. With the exception of Saman, all of the major deities of the Sinhala pantheon are represented here, in addition to Śiva and Hūniyam (a lower-level figure whose "specialties" include sorcery and in some ways is a low-country counterpart to the up-country Däḍimunda).[4]

Because of the presence of these *dēvālaya*s, Bellanvila has become a locally important pilgrimage site of its own. It functions as a type of surrogate sacred place for Colombo Buddhists unwilling or unable to travel to the major *dēvālaya*s or "cultic seats" of the gods distantly located in the up-country or down the southern coast. The timing of Bellanvila's Äsaḷa *perahära* also suggests this role. There is little question that Bellanvila has endeavored to become a "complete" religious center assisting Buddhists with their *laukika* needs and *lōkōttara* aspirations. In a sense, Bellanvila is a microcosm of Sinhala Buddhism in modern Sri Lanka. Here, one finds lay Buddhists of the more traditional type mingling with Western-educated monks and other religious specialists who traffic with sorcery and possession states. As such, it is a suitable context in which to explore the comparative significance of Nātha's transformed identity as Maitrī in the contemporary milieu.

There are no primary literary or sculptural references to Nātha's identity as Maitrī, although the identity is usually noted by modern Sinhala observers of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.[5] The absolute conflation of the two must be a comparatively recent phenomenon historically, since Nātha and Maitrī are distinctively portrayed as the bodhisattva attendants of the Buddha in the Dambulla cave sculptures (see Plates 26 and 27) and in the wall paintings of the *budugē* at the Asgiriya *Vihāraya* in Kandy. Both date to the eighteenth-century reign of Kīrtti Śrī Rājasinha.

In the absence of textual, epigraphic, ritual, or iconographic evidence documenting the fusion of these two figures, only a plausible speculation can be explored regarding its causes and dynamics before discussing its religious significance, specifically at Bellanvila and more generally in modern Sri Lanka.

When the Buddha, Avalokiteśvara, and Maitreya appear as a triad in Sri Lanka (at Dambulla and Asgiriya, for instance), they represent the past realization, the present protection, and the future guarantee of the *dhamma*. From the fourteenth century until the disestablishment of kingship in the early nineteenth century, Avalokiteśvara/Nātha was regarded as a protector of Sinhala polity, which, as we have noted, understood itself as responsible for the protection and perpetuation of the *dhamma* in the present. Avalokiteśvara/Nātha's public role was thus virtually identical with royalty.

The Buddha, *dhamma,* and *sangha* have remained the formal refuges for all Buddhists in Sinhala Sri Lanka, but historically the institution of kingship, seeing one of its primary roles as supporting the *Buddha sāsana,* actually created a secondary set of "three refuges": kingship, *dhamma* (in the Aśokan sense of general morality), and the Buddhist state.[6] In Chapter 2, we discussed a more inclusive concept of *sangha,* one equivalent to all Lankan Buddhists (lay and monastic) alike responsible for the perpetuity and purity of the *dhamma.* Buddhist kings, as the chief laymen, took this primary responsibility very seriously, and there is copious evidence revealing how very adroit they were at identifying themselves with the Buddha and the state with the *sangha.* In terms of a metaphysical translation, the king and the state seem to have embodied the *sambhogokāya* aspect of the bodhisattva for the laity. The last line of the Kandyan kings, the Nāyakkars, was no exception. Indeed, Kīrtti Śrī Rājasinha's long reign in the eighteenth century was almost prototypical in this regard: he reestablished the ordination lines in the *sangha* and sponsored a renaissance in Kandyan cultural traditions so that the art created for monastic *vihārayas* served the pedagogical function of expressing the truth of *dhamma* in narrative and sculptural forms.

The British disestablishment of Kandyan kingship in the early nineteenth century, therefore, created major repercussions for the Buddhist concept of community, especially in relation to the present condition and future realization of the Buddha's *dhamma.*[7]

As I have endeavored to show, Nātha's relation to Kandyan kingship was very intimate. Not only was he regarded as the highest of the national guardian deities (reflected in his ritual position immediately following the Buddha's in Kīrtti Śrī's restructured Äsaḷa *perahära* procession), and not only was his shrine located directly across from the *Daḷadā Māligāva* and the royal palace, making it ritually at the center of Kandy's pulsating galactic polity, but Nātha was the deity from whom the king, it was believed, received his formal name and divine sanction. Nātha's ritual roles were so closely wedded to the *lōkōttara* and *laukika* interests of Kandyan kingship that disestablishment, in effect, robbed him of his traditional sacred and public roles. He became a deity with no express public *laukika* purpose, except to his individual devotees who continued to seek his *laukika* assistance for personal or collective (village) well-being at his remote surviving *dēvālayas.*

Within the context of a resurgent, sometimes militant and "modernizing" Buddhism in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the ways in which Nātha could be understood as religiously significant were therefore limited, for the communal character of Buddhism has experienced profound changes as the outlines of "Buddhist modernism" have begun to emerge during the past 100 years.

Belief and cult associated with the guardian deities have been and continue to be almost exclusively lay and *laukika*-oriented. With the twin forces of modernization (reinterpreting Buddhism to be more applicable to the needs of modern Western-educated followers) and secularization (giving rise to scepticism about the supernatural powers of the gods), the cults of the guardian deities, with the noted exception of Kataragama, have waned drastically. More and more in modern Sri Lanka, Buddhists are encouraged by modern-minded reformers to engage a religious path to *nibbāna* under the tutelage of the *sangha* without making appeals to divine intervention. In addition to the practice of meditation, lay Buddhists are instructed to involve themselves in more specifically *lōkōttara*-oriented rites, rites that clearly are merit-making activities that will enhance prospects for favorable rebirth and, hence, provide for progress on the path to *nibbāna*. The recent innovation of *bodhi pūjā* is a primary example,[8] as is the ever increasingly popular practice of chanting *pirit*. In the absence of kingship, the *sangha* and ambitious lay reformers, such as the early-twentieth-century figure Anagarika Dharmapala, have clearly stepped in to orient the religious lives of the laity in a much more emphasized *lōkōttara* direction. There has occurred, in the process, a "monasticization" of lay Buddhism. Practicing meditation, observing *sil* on *pōya* days, undertaking pilgrimages, reading the *sutta*s (especially the *Dhammapada*) have, in some degree, become much more pertinent forms of religious practice than worshiping the Buddha and transferring the merit from such actions to the gods to strengthen their powers for providing *laukika* assistance. In this religious climate, propitiation of the gods for immediate *laukika* assistance has therefore not been stressed. Rather, a lay-oriented Buddhism much more in substantial conformity with the religious lives ideally lived by monks has been encouraged. Some have seen in this process a "protestantization" of Buddhism [Gombrich and Obeyesekere]. Such an interpretation makes a good deal of sense when Luther's description of the church as the "priesthood of all believers" is recalled. But it can be misleading if it fails to note the "monasticization" process now at work. Where has this left Nātha? And what does this mean for my argument?

Nātha's association with divine kingship and the state in Kandy is now a historical legacy of Sinhala Buddhist culture. In one way, Nātha, as a remnant of the old cult of divine kingship, can be seen as having become a repository of the royal ascription that the king was a buddha-in-the-making. But in the process, Nātha was largely shorn of *laukika* import, except in those few villages we have detailed where his cult has survived.

What is now so intriguing, however, is that Nātha's forgotten bodhisattva status as Avalokiteśvara has been reapplied within the context of a confusion between the traditional Sinhala but noncanonical belief (that the guardian

deities, like the king, are buddhas-in-the-making) and the specifically canonical Theravāda understanding that Metteyya is the *only* future buddha. The former belief is testimony to the fact that the old religious culture of Sinhala Buddhism was far more inclusive than the new. That is, the canonical belief regarding the future Buddha Metteyya was not regarded exclusively or dogmatically. As I have pointed out repeatedly, gods and kings were often considered future buddhas in the history of Sinhala Buddhism.

The survival of "extracanonical" elements in traditional Sinhala Buddhism, if this case study has a wider applicability, depends upon the manner in which these elements can be integrated into the Theravāda hermeneutic modeled on the *lōkōttara* path. Newly integrated *laukika* elements are religious insofar as they assuage the experience of *dukkha* and are conducive to spiritual progress toward the *lōkōttara* goal. In the present context, I would argue that this thesis is even more true now than it has been in preceding eras of Sinhala Buddhist history, but what is different in the modern period is that the hermeneutic is being used more exclusively than inclusively by "Buddhist modernists." Sinhala Buddhism, under the pressures of modernization and the spectacular rise of ethnic consciousness, seems to be in the process of becoming more rigid than pliable, more militant than accommodating, and, after a fashion, more *lōkōttara*-oriented than *laukika*.

It would seem only logical, then, that some Buddhists, influenced at once by a resurgent "modern Buddhism" yet reluctantly not wanting to give up religiocultural legacies, would seek to identify the highest of the gods (Nātha) in the Sinhala Buddhist divine pantheon, the deity formerly legitimating Kandyan kingship and its responsibility to perpetuate the *Buddha sāsana*, with the next buddha, Maitrī, the future symbol of *lōkōttara* aspirations. This conflation seems to be the combination of a specific Theravāda belief (in Metteyya) and a specific Sinhalese religiopolitical historical and cultural legacy (Nātha as a present guarantor and future buddha). In this instance, Nātha (the former guarantor of *dhamma* in the present) became identified with Maitrī (the future realization) in a new context where kingship (and, to a certain extent, the gods) had become irrelevant. As a result, traditions relating to the future of the Buddha's *dhamma* remained localized (in the villages), and the belief ("extracanonical") in Lanka's special destiny to perpetuate the *dhamma* was also preserved (in the nation).

There is one remaining important question: what is the substance of the contemporary belief in Maitrī (Nātha)? There is no separate cult of Maitrī, no sectarian movement focusing on his advent, nor does belief in Maitrī seem to be a burgeoning religious phenomenon in modern Sri Lanka. Moreover, the era of colonial history in Sri Lanka, which included inspired "nativistic" resistance to colonial hegemony, especially in the 1818 and 1848 rebellions,

witnessed no Maitreya-based millenarian or revitalization movements, despite the fact that movements of this nature occurred periodically in another British-dominated Theravāda Buddhist culture, Burma. Sinhala Buddhist hopes for the establishment of a forthcoming "golden era" in the 1950s (following political independence) were much more focused on restoring Buddhism to its "rightful place" before the British "betrayed Buddhism." Visions of the new Buddhist society were based much more on modern reinterpretations of the old—specifically, the manner in which state and *sangha* in the ancient Anuradhapura era were reenvisaged. Thus, two types of pressures were brought to bear on that situation: one in which Sinhala Buddhists sought to restore Theravāda Buddhism to its former place of privilege and another in which Sinhala Buddhists sought to make Buddhist thought the ideological basis for a developing modern society.[9]

Waiting on Maitrī is sometimes seen, in this modern context, as a passive and private soteriological hope rather than as a constructive aim for the restoration of a vigorously revived Buddhism in a modern Sri Lankan society. In the latter, eschatological hopes have been merged with a contemporary social vision. However, the myth of Maitrī's coming era remains seemingly peripheral to "Buddhist modernists," especially those with a vision of how Buddhism can become the ideological and moral bases of an emergent modernizing and economically developing society.

Maitrī remains an important soteriological hope for most traditional village Sinhala Buddhists, inasmuch as they continue to identify their own ultimate future spiritual realizations with his attainment of enlightenment in the distant future. Typologically, this kind of traditional eschatological hope might be understood as a "here/*later*" realization.[10]

For "Buddhist modernists," however, soteriological hopes are better understood as "here/now." This is a fascinating development, insofar as this same movement stresses the ultimate *lōkōttara* religious orientation in its didactic relationship with the laity.

The religious significance of Maitrī in contemporary Sri Lanka is therefore dichotomous. This became evident from comparative reflections on the numerous conversations and interviews I conducted in up-country villages and in urban Colombo. Village visions of ultimate soteriological realization are consistently akin to the futuristic scenario articulated in the Sinhala *Anāgatavaṃsa Desanā*. The vision of urban "Buddhist modernists," on the other hand, represents an inversion of the dynamics presented in that text.

In the *Anāgatavaṃsa Desanā,* rebirth in the future kingdom of Ketumatī during the enlightenment of Metteyya is understood as an eventual *karm*ic fruit for those who live the morally good religious life and who endeavor to support the *sangha*. Performing "good works" leads to rebirth in a time in

which conditions for the attainment of *nibbāna* will be ideal. *Nibbāna,* in this view, is a distant soteriological goal symbolized by the enlightenment of future Buddha Metteyya. The ultimate *lōkōttara* realization is not regarded as an immediate existential possibility.

It is precisely this belief that distinguishes the traditional Sinhala Buddhism of village Sri Lanka from those who articulate a "modern Buddhism." At Bellanwila, the emphases of religious activities are upon the *here and now.* Following the Buddha's path, realizing *nibbāna* here and now is what will enable Sinhala Buddhists to create a new, prosperous and enlightened modern Sri Lankan society. While the village traditions of Sinhala Buddhism conceive of ultimate *lōkōttara* attainment after temporal *laukika* efforts, "Buddhist modernism" seems to be saying that *lōkōttara*-oriented path actions lead to a *laukika* fulfillment; that this-worldly well-being is the consequence of spiritual realization (which seems to be precisely what Weber argued in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*). That is, the old formula of the means (*karma*) leading to the possibility of realizing the end (*nibbāna*) has been inverted. Engaging in *lōkōttara*-oriented actions insures favorable *laukika* conditions. This would seem to be the by-product of seeking to making Buddhist thought the ideological basis of a modern Sinhala society. This inverted pattern occurred to me after several conversations with a number of Bellanwila's most respected *bhikkhus*.

These *bhikkhus* are not compelled by the identification of Nātha with Maitrī/Metteyya. For them, Nātha is connected to Theravāda only because "many lay people now believe that Nātha is Maitrī." They characterize the traditional Sinhala (*Anāgatavaṃsa*) belief in Metteyya/Maitrī as no more than passive hope, putting off into the future what can be accomplished here in the present. While admitting that *karm*ic acts undertaken by laity with the hope of being reborn in Maitrī's era is a positive motivation, they assert that belief in Maitrī should entail, instead, the cultivation of the spiritual quality of *maitrī,* "loving-kindness," and its extension ultimately to all living beings. In their view, the power of the Maitrī vision lies not in the future, but in its present existential and spiritual realization.

I encountered the same type of reasoning in conversations about the significance of meditation. The purpose of meditation is not only to make specifically *lōkōttara* personal progress but to harness the energies of the mind so that one will be better prepared to meet the *immediate* (*laukika*) tasks one faces in daily life. The pragmatic consequences of leading the religious life are consistently stressed by monks and laity of the modern persuasion. The inversion of *laukika* and *lōkōttara* seems complete.

This type of understanding is leading to the demythologization of Maitrī in the interests of the existential pragmatism characteristic of "Buddhist modern-

ism." For these *bhikkhus*, cultivating "loving-kindness" rather than waiting for *karm*ic fruits in the hope of joining Maitrī in the future is the call of the hour.

On my last trip to Colombo several days before leaving the island in 1985, I again visited one of the *bhikkhus* at Bellanwila who had been very helpful to me and some of my students during my 2-year stay in Sri Lanka. As we were sipping tea in his office, I noticed a small, white Chinese porcelain statue of Kuan Yin in his bookcase. When I asked him where it had come from, he said: "I received it as a gift from a visiting friend. I have forgotten who it is."

This incident seemed to summarize for me what the future may hold for the cult of Nātha in Sri Lanka if the forces of "Buddhist modernism" continue. Avalokiteśvara, of course, has been long forgotten. And now Maitrī, his transformed identity, is being demythologized by so-called modernists and reformers. As the modernists and reformers, who seem quite alienated from the village roots of Sinhala Buddhist religious culture, seek to establish a "purer" Buddhism, they engage in a militant process of religiocultural emasculation. As a result, the traditional Sinhala Buddhist cult of Avalokiteśvara/Nātha/Maitrī may be completely eclipsed if their efforts succeed in establishing a triumphant Pāli canonical Buddhism among the laity. Unfortunately, in modern Sri Lanka, the forces of exclusivity (Buddhism "modernism" being a primary example) may, in time, totally blot out the historical Sinhala Buddhist penchant for inclusivity. What will happen when it is discovered that the Theravāda *lōkōttara* hermeneutic does not effectively provide for the desired *laukika* results (the reversal of the pattern that I have argued has taken place historically)? Traditional Sinhala Buddhist religious culture, greatly distorted in the twentieth century by urban-based reformers, already may be irrevocably imperiled.

There is yet another force, in addition to "Buddhist modernism," that is impinging critically on the contours of contemporary Sinhala Buddhist culture. Gombrich and Obeyesekere's recently published study on contemporary religious change in urban Colombo elucidates the great rise in popularity of what they call "spirit religion." Herein, they argue, the cult of Kataragama and the cults of lesser deities (notably Kāli and Hūniyam) have mushroomed due to the intense manner in which *bhakti* religiosity (or "Hinduization") is now affecting Sinhala culture. Their analysis of the socioeconomic causes of this new force is complex. My own argument, I think, helps to put theirs into a historical context.

In the preceding chapters, I have shown how during various phases of Sri Lankan history, Sinhala Buddhist religious culture has repeatedly accommodated diverse forms of Hindu and Mahāyāna Buddhist spirituality, the primary

example being the cult of Avalokiteśvara. In their study, Gombrich and Obeyesekere point to modern social displacement and economic deprivation as the chief causes driving Colombo's urban oppressed to seek out religious forms of life that are more immediately satisfying, pragmatic, and soteriologically significant. Unlike Buddhist "modernists," Gombrich and Obeyesekere point out that Buddhist philosophy is too complicated and abstruse for these less-educated folk who eschew the metaphysical in search of the magical. They seek a catharsis to their existential predicaments and are driven to new innovations in religion (regardless of religious affiliation) to cope with their disturbing conditions. If we follow Gombrich and Obeyesekere, we can understand flights to occult practices (*laukika* sorcery and divination) and ecstatic trance possession states (*lōkōttara* soteriological realization) as attempts to realize power, well-being, and spiritual bliss in the face of socioeconomic depravity. (This argument seems to be based on a muted Marxist understanding of religion.)

The pattern of assimilating popular Hindu practices is certainly not new, as my own study has repeatedly demonstrated. And, as we have seen in Chapter 8, possession states of the sort Gombrich and Obeyesekere describe need not be attributed to Hindu sources. But what they seem to have isolated is a pattern of incorporating efficacious forms of religiosity that are clearly of the *laukika* sort but not yet, on the whole, brought into relation to the structure and substance of Theravāda Buddhist *lōkōttara* soteriology. In the conclusion to their study, Gombrich and Obeyesekere address this point directly by stating:

> The question is whether they [*bhakti* religiosity and black magic] can continue to co-exist with Buddhist soteriology without much affecting it. Already the emotional climate of Sinhala religiosity has changed. Are more tangible changes on the way?
>
> We cannot pretend to answer this question; we prefer to wait and see [460].

Gombrich and Obeyesekere go on to state, however, that early Buddhism "acquired an element of thaumaturgy and devotion when the cult of the future Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, began the great movement called Mahāyāna. We do not think Sri Lanka will go the same way" [460].

However, Gombrich and Obeyesekere, during the course of an earlier discussion in their study regarding how the "Hindu" cult of Sai Baba has been recently appropriated by urban Sinhala Buddhists (thus illustrating again "the rising tide of *bhakti* religiosity" in contemporary Sinhala culture), report that some of their informants now regard Sai Baba as Nātha:

> Sai Baba is a contemporary Indian religious leader who simply preaches the love of God and performs miracles in the central tradition of Indian holy men.

> Whether he himself is God is ambiguous, in that the ultimate is not a person, and yet if a personal symbol is wanted he will do very well. As ultimately all is one, no religion is false—unless, presumably, it denies the authenticity of Sai Baba's miracles. This religion might look like the polar opposite to Theravāda Buddhism. Yet more and more urban middle class Buddhists (imitating their Hindu neighbors) are worshipping Sai Baba in private shrine rooms, chanting his hymns (*bhajan*) of praise to God, and seeing their highest bliss in any opportunity to prostrate themselves at His blessed feet.
>
> Some Buddhist devotees of Sai Baba ritually combine their two allegiances in daily devotions as follows: after taking the Buddhist Three Refuges and five precepts they sing hymns to Sai Baba and end with the usual Pāli verse by which Buddhists invite all deities to empathize with the merit gained by their religious activities. *Some of these devotees hold that Sai Baba is the Buddhist god Nātha. The meaning of this ascription is that Nātha is traditionally considered to be the current incarnation of the next Buddha, Maitreya. These Buddhists have thus assimilated Sai Baba into the Buddhist pantheon and made him a Bodhisattva* [53; emphasis mine].

It seems clear to me that Gombrich and Obeyesekere's discussion may, in fact, point to the future accommodation and Sinhala inclusivity (in the process, running a direct collision course with "Buddhist modernism"). It also provides a perfect example of what they seem reluctant to predict: that religious change will continue to occur (and be sustained) in Sinhala religious culture as long as new innovations are related to the assuaging of *dukkha* and the ultimate *lōkōttara* attainment.

Veneration of Sai Baba has been explicitly legitimated by its connection to the traditional symbol of Buddhist eschatological and soteriological hope: Nātha/Maitrī. It is precisely this *lōkōttara* connection that makes such cultic activity "religious" in the Theravāda sense. In conclusion, I mention it as one last illustration of my own thesis: that new religiocultural fashions, if they resonate with contemporary existential needs, will be assimilated and sustained if they can be functionally related to or identified within the umbrella of Theravāda Buddhist soteriology.

The forces of spirit religion will pose no competitive soteriological threat to Theravāda Buddhism in the future. Historically, this form of religious practice has always been systematically subordinated to the Buddhāgama. If there is a threat to traditional Sinhala Buddhist religious culture, it comes in the form of "Buddhist modernism," or "protestant Buddhism," which seeks "*nirvāṇa* here and now." That is, distortions (perhaps even millenarian movements) in Sinhala culture will occur as confused reformers seek to make *lōkōttara laukika,* when they seek to make what is essentially eternal temporal.

NOTES

1. Introduction

1. Theravāda soteriology is an expression of the religious conviction that human suffering can be overcome by the enlightening experiences of wisdom (through the cultivation of knowledge), concentrated awareness (through meditative discipline), and selfless actions (the social expression of equanimous disposition). See Buddhaghosa (the fifth-century A.D. orthodox Theravāda commentator), *Visuddhimagga* [1964] within which he identifies and interrelates *paññā, samādhi,* and *sīla* as categorically and substantively definitive for the quest of *nibbāna.*

2. For recent studies of Maitreya in many of the Buddhist traditions of Asia (especially east Asia), see the essays edited by Hardacre and Sponberg [1988].

3. In his study of the pilgrimage centers in the Tamil cult of Murukan, Clothey [1983] states:

> A[n] . . . element in the mood of contemporary Tamil Nadu which is obvious from all that has been said above is its increasing strident and proud regionalism. Tamil politics certainly express this. Murukan's recent popularity, in no small measure, is derived from the fact that the god has been so thoroughly identified with Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu is the god's domain; the six [pilgrimage] centers are *cakras* which sacralize the region. In stressing the Tamilness of Murukan, his devotees find a sense of their identity as Tamilians. The deity embodies not a few of the aspirations of religious Tamilians both for themselves and for their region—eternal youthfulness, productivity, unconditioned freedom. The god similarly epitomizes the Tamilian's growing image of his Tamil culture—its age, its persistence, its relative sovereignty in the face of accretions and modifications from non-Tamil sources, and its vigorous and youthful potentiality. In short, the Murukan cultus helps Tamil adherents answer the question "who are we?" [44–45].

4. A *kapurāla* is the chief ritual specialist at the *dēvālaya* (shrine; literally: "lair of the god"). I hesitate to use the word *priest* in describing them, for generally they are not referred to as such by the Sinhalese. In many ways, however, they are more "priestly" than Buddhist monks. A *kapurāla*'s basic sacerdotal function is to mediate between his patrons and the deities. His power depends upon his spiritual purity and his knowledge of *yātikā* (petitionary prayers). The position is usually hereditary, and often the *kapurāla* is bound to the temple because of *rājakāriya.* If the son of a *kapurāla* does not succeed his father, the son of the *kapurāla*'s sister is the likely

successor, but there is no formal clerical order. I will discuss the administrative hierarchy of the *dēvālaya* in Chapter 6.

5. Mecca is known as *Makkama* in Sinhala, and there is a reference in the popular text *Hīmagatavarṇanāva* to the effect that the Buddha's left footprint is found there (the right footprint being found at Śrī Pāda, or Adam's Peak). There is also mention of this tradition in some of the local *Vitti* texts. Pilgrimage remains an extraordinarily important form of Sinhala popular religion [see my "Pilgrimage and the Structure of Sinhalese Buddhism," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 5 (1982): 23–40]. The "system" of holy places in Sri Lanka is quite extensive indeed. There are actually several lists, but the 16 places that are generally regarded as the holiest are those associated with a visit from the Buddha. In addition to the 4 already mentioned, there are 8 places of pilgrimage in Anuradhapura: Śrī Mahābodhi, Mirisavāṭiya, Ruvanvälisāya, Lankārāma, Thūpārāma, Abhayagiri, Jetavana, and the remains of the Mahāvihāra monastery. Nearby is Mihintale, about 8 miles to the east and the purported site where Aśoka's missionary *bhikkhu* son, Mahinda, converted the Sinhalese king Devānampiya Tissa. Other sacred places of pilgrimage included in the list of 16 holy sites of pilgrimage known to the Sinhala Buddhism of the Kandyan period and frequently depicted in Kandyan temple wall paintings: Mutiyangana in Badulla, Kiri Vehera in Kataragama, Tissamahārāma (about 10 miles south of Kirivehera), Dīghavāpi (east of Amparai), and the mysterious Divyaguhā ("Divine Cave"), now lost to history but said by tradition to be located at the foot of Śrī Pāda. While these 16 places are associated with mythical visits of the Buddha, another list of 32 appears in the *Mahābodhivaṃsa*. These sites are *vihārayas* where saplings from Śrī Mahābodhi in Anuradhapura have been planted. Together with the addition of the Daḷadā Māligāva in Kandy, the 16 and 32 sacred places make up the sacred geography of Buddhist pilgrimage in Lanka. For a brief discussion, see Gombrich [1971: 109–11]. In Chapter 7, we will see how 64 sacred places of the Kandyan kingdom figure prominently in traditional rites of royal power associated with the Nātha Dēvālaya in Kandy.

5a. See the argument advanced by Shu Hikosaka, *Buddhism in Tamil Nadu: A New Perspective,* in which on the basis of extensive fieldwork in the region of the Potiya hills in the Tirunelveli district, he identifies the region as the original seat of worship of Avalokiteśvara.

6. By referring to the monastic spiritual path as the "path of purity," I mean to state that Buddhaghosa's interpretive understanding of the noble eightfold path in his classic *Visuddhimagga* [1964] is the standard, orthodox interpretation of the monastic experience.

7. See, for example, the *Tevijja Sutta* in the *Dīgha Nikāya* [T. W. Rhys Davids and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, 1921, vol. 1: 309–10), where petitions to Indra, Soma, Varuṇa, Īśāna, Brahmā, and Prajāpati are scoffed at; see also the *Samyutta Nikāya* [Woodward, 1922, vol. 4: 218–20], where *brahman*ical rites to assist the dead in their afterlife sojourns are compared to the practice of commanding rocks to float on water.

8. Wednesdays and Saturdays of each week are the only days, in addition to *pōya* days and *mangālyayas*, when the *kapurālas* are present and petitions are formally made to the gods.

9. *Tathāgata* is an ambiguous Pāli compound combining either *tathā* + *gata* or *tathā* + *āgata*. Therefore, it can also be translated as "thus-come-one." This translation is usually used within Mahāyāna contexts to signify the Buddha's salvific presence. In Theravāda, however, "thus-gone-one" is preferred because it indicates that the Buddha has conquered rebirth and "gone" to the "further shore" of *nibbāna*.

10. Image houses within *vihāraya* compounds sometimes contain only the icons of the Buddha but usually contain the images of the gods as well.

11. It should be clear now that the religious soteriology of Theravāda tradition and what I have been referring to as "Sinhala Buddhism" are not to be wholly equated. There are two ways that help to delineate their differences. From the perspective of the religious culture of Sri Lanka, Sinhala Buddhism refers to the cumulative religiocultural tradition of symbols, rites, and beliefs cultivated by laity and monks that are expressed through cosmological, cultic, and social modes of discourse. From this perspective, Theravāda soteriology is a part of Sinhala Buddhism. In fact, the practice of *vipassanā* meditation, the performance of selfless actions, and the cultivation of wisdom, all of which are said to lead to *nibbāna*, are located at the apex of Sinhala Buddhist religiousness, but they do not exhaust the total means of action appropriated to assuage the problem of *dukkha*. Other types of cultic behavior that invoke Buddhist symbols and teachings and have a more applied immediate purpose, however, are also part of this same system of belief and practice. Specifically, I am referring to the cultic forms of worshiping and petitioning the gods, practices that, from the perspective of their practitioners, are regarded as Buddhist. Nātha, Saman, Pattinī, Kataragama, Vibhīṣana, and Viṣṇu are not just "Sinhala gods" to their devotees. They are also "Buddhist gods," chiefly because they have been integrated into the same cosmological constructions anchored in Theravāda assumptions regarding the structure of reality.

From the perspective of Theravāda soteriology as a pan-Asian phenomenon, a soteriology that the Sinhalese share with Theravāda traditions in Burma and Thailand, this latter type of cultic behavior may be regarded as somewhat idiosyncratic to Sinhala culture. Though there are parallels that can be drawn between the Burmese cult of the *nats* and the Thai propitiation of *phii*, these are not the substance of soteriological practice.

Sinhala Buddhism therefore includes the specific canonically based practices and beliefs of Theravāda soteriology, as well as other popular forms of religious expression, but Theravāda soteriology is not exhausted by its Sinhala Buddhist cultural context. It is true to say that it transcends it.

12. Southwold [1983: 78ff.] suggests that *melova* and *paralova* are "pure Sinhala" equivalents to *laukika* and *lōkōttara*. The former two terms, however, refer to the *physical* presence of "this world" and "other world." Gombrich [1971: 58] basically

abstains from the discussion on the grounds that he did not find the latter two terms in currency during his fieldwork.

13. See my and Udaya Meddegama's forthcoming English translation of the *Anāgatavaṃsa: The Sermon of the Chronicle-to-Be.*

2. The Relevant Historical and Doctrinal Background

1. The *pāṭimokkha* was a collective rite of the *sangha* transacted every 2 weeks in which each item of monastic discipline within the *Vinaya* was collectively recited to insure that individual monks systematically examined the intentions of their personal actions. Ritually, it became a statement of the *sangha*'s continuing pure *sīla* (moral action). The *pavāraṇā* functioned in much the same way during the 3-month period of *vassa* (rain retreat) except that, in this instance, monks were "invited" to scrutinize each other's behavior. For a further discussion, see my essay [1978].

2. In underscoring the relative autonomy of the early Buddhist *sangha,* Sukumar Dutt [1962: 80–81] has stated that

> [t]he concept of society in the political philosophy of ancient India was that of an aggregate composed of units of diverse kinds—learned bodies, village communities, religious corporations, etc. Each was regarded as subject to its own system of law, called *Samaya* (Conventional Law) in ancient Indian Jurisprudence. With regard to these units of society, it was the king's constitutional duty to see that none of them suffered from internal or external disruption and that the established system of conventional law of each was not transgressed. Among these societal units, the Buddhist sangha became one, an "association group" functioning under a system of law of its own.

3. There are no less than 28 known texts of this kind in the Tibetan *Tanjur* and *Kanjur.* For brief descriptions of each, see *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism,* vol. 3: 403–25.

4. Marie-Therese de Mallman [1948] provides the most comprehensive review of the various arguments advanced in favor of particular interpretations. See Mallman, pp. 57–82.

5. Mironov [1927] and Hurvitz [1976] assert that, at least in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka,* the compound is formed by *Avalokita* + *svara.* If so, this radically changes the translation as indicated by Hurvitz's "He who observes the sounds of the world." See also von Stael-Holstein [1936].

6. Because one of these two *sūtras* is quoted as a separate work in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* by Śāntideva, both are regarded as interpolations added to the original *Mahāvastu* [Winternitz, 1927, vol. 2: 245]. The same *sūtra* referred to by Śāntideva has also survived in Tibetan as a separate text, yet both contain what is quite possibly the earliest surviving use of the term *avalokita* in Buddhist Sanskrit religious literature.

7. In the *Śūrangama Sūtra* [Lu, 1966: 135–43], which purportedly was translated from Sanskrit to Chinese in the early eighth century A.D., Avalokiteśvara is made to

say that he takes on many other forms besides these enumerated in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. This passage may be inspired by the 25th chapter of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, but it occurs within the context of a discussion on the meditation of hearing reflecting the Chinese understanding/interpretation of the bodhisattva's name.

8. See Schopen [1987], who argues vigorously to the contrary that the earliest evidence for the cult of Avalokiteśvara is no earlier than fifth-century Mathurā.

9. For a brilliant study of Indo-Aryan cosmogonic myths, of which this one is clearly an example, and their significance for cosmogony and social structure, see Lincoln [1986], especially pp. 1–40, where he sets forth the central alloformic meanings of parts of the body sacrificed. The heart of his argument is given on p. 40:

> Within that [Indo-European] system, the anthropogony and cosmogony were both described, the two being complementary halves of one cyclical process, a process whereby matter was recurrently transubstantiated from a microcosmic form to a macrocosmic form and thence back again, bones becoming stones and stones becoming bones . . . world without end. The body and the universe are alloforms of each other, their respective component parts subtly interrelated [brackets mine].

10. I am aware that the term *dhyāni* has been shown recently to be a late Newari neologism, but it has been used so extensively in secondary studies that it has now become a convention, especially in art history. I use it advisedly, realizing that the term itself is not found in ancient Sanskrit literature.

11. Winternitz [1927, vol. 2: 306–7] notes that the *Karaṇḍavyūha* was part of the Tibetan *Kanjur* translated in A.D. 616, yet he speculates that it originally may have been composed in the fourth century A.D.

12. Cowell [1879] compares this section of the *sūtra* to the apocryphal second-century A.D. early Christian text *The Gospel of Nichodemus*, in which Christ, the "King of Glory," makes a triumphant and radiant visit of Hell and all of the souls of the damned under Hades and Beelzabub are raised to heaven. He asks whether or not it possible that the two stories might not have a common origin.

13. Brief summaries of this story may be found in Bournouf [1844: 223–24], Thomas [1933: 191–92], and Mitra [1882: 96–97]. My summary is based on a reading of the Sanskrit text in P. L. Vaidya [1961].

14. See Goloubew [1927] for a classic study of the iconography of the Balāha bas-relief at Nak Pan to the east of Angkor. With regard to a bas-relief of Balāha at Borobudur, he makes the following comment: "Le fair que cette composition à ete dans le cycle d'images consacrees à Maitreya (3e et 4e galeries), permet de supposer que, dans le pensee du sculpteur javanais, le Buddha futur à du substituer au bodhisattva Lokeśvara" [236–37], a finding that coincides with historical developments some 1,000 years later in Sri Lanka.

15. John Strong [private communication] attributes the story of the shipwrecked sailors to Gopadatta, an important *avadāna* literary figure of eighth-century Indian

Buddhism. But the fact that other versions of this story are found in the Pāli *Jātakas* and the Lokottara Mahāsaṃghika *Mahāvastu*, as well as the *AGKs*, would seem to indicate an earlier recension.

16. From the eighth through the thirteenth centuries, Avalokiteśvara's cult became enormously important to the legitimation of kingship in insular and peninsular Southeast Asia. From the kingdom of Śrī Vijaya, it spread north into Cambodia and eventually made its impact in both Thai and Burmese contexts. In fact, many of the scenes from the *Avalokiteśvara-Guṇa-Karaṇḍavyūha sūtra* were portrayed in massive stone reliefs and friezes at Bantay Chmar in the thirteenth-century reign of Jayavarman VII [Chutiwongs, 1984: 320–27] and the days of the great Khmer civilization of Angkor in Cambodia. Here the king was regarded as a *Buddharāja* and the very this-worldly embodiment of Avalokiteśvara.

17. During the month of Vesak, which in general corresponds to May–June, *upasampadā* (ordination) rites held at the Daḷadā Māligāva in Kandy dramatically reenact Gotama's renunciation. At astrologically determined times, troupes of traditionally clad Kandyan dancers ceremonially entertain an observant *samanera* (novice) as he stands under a painting of the future Buddha Metteyya and enjoys the last moments of his premonastic life. Dressed in the garb of a royal prince and mounted on an elephant (a symbol of royal power), the *samanera* is paraded through the streets of Kandy in a *perahära* procession to either the Malvatta or Asgiriya Vihārayas, where the formal *upasampadā* rites, as detailed in the Pāli *Vinaya*, are conducted and transform the novice into full *bhikkhu*. For a discussion of the *Vinaya* prescriptions, see my *Discipline* [1981b: 106–24]. For an account of the significance of the *Vessantara Jātaka* in Thai *upasampadā* rites, see Swearer [1976].

18. For a translation of the *Vessantara Jātaka* illustrated by Kandyan temple wall paintings, see Gombrich and Cone [1977].

19. See my and Udaya Meddegama's *Anāgatavaṃsa Desanā: The Sermon of the Chronicle-to-Be*, forthcoming.

20. See the "Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Suttanta" in Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids [1921, vol. 2: 77–91].

21. Sinhalese politicians, especially, rarely miss a chance to invoke his name, to cite his historic cause, and to allign their own promises with the accomplishments of the great ancient king. Duṭṭhagāmaṇī's contraventions of the Buddhist moral precept of "not to kill" and his utilization of sacred men and sacred symbols for use in warfare are overshadowed, in Sinhala national consciousness, by his successful fulfillment of the royal duty to protect the well-being and longevity of the *sāsana* (the historical legacy of the Buddha's *dhamma*.

22. See especially Sarkisyanz [1965], Tambiah [1976], and Reynolds [1972].

23. Private communication, Professor R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, Department of History, University of Peradeniya.

3. Ascetic and King

1. This is especially true of the most recent popular iconography of Saman, the god of Adam's Peak; see Plates 36 and 37 for an example of this appropriation at Isurumeṇu in Anuradhapura in 1984. Gombrich and Obeyesekere [1988: 31] point to other instances in which elements of Saman's iconography, such as the elephant *vahana,* have been "borrowed" for Nātha. This is clearly the case at Bellanvila, a modern religious complex just southeast of Colombo.

2. The identification of the "Kuṣtharāja" image of Plate 8 has for many years puzzled a number of eminent scholars. Paranavitana [1928] originally believed that the image was of Avalokiteśvara, and a Department of Archaeology sign at the Väligama site still depicts the image as such today. Prematilleke [1978: 172–75], while not accepting Paranavitana's argument as fully compelling, has nonetheless indicated how such a judgment might be supported on various grounds, including local legend of "Kuṣtharāja," a foreign king or local ruler cured of a skin disease "by the munificence of a god." Prematilleke has recalled how Avalokiteśvara is considered to be a bodhisattva who was believed to cure precisely this same ailment. Prematilleke goes on to review J. E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw's argument that the image is one of the "Ādi-Buddha Samantabhadra in his Dharmakāya aspect." Prematilleke's own conclusion is that considerable confusion and merging of the iconographies of Samantrabhadra and Avalokiteśvara resulted in the construction of the statue. In any case, the Kuṣtharājagala statue is one more piece of evidence indicating the extent to which bodhisattva power was conflated with royal *laukika* power in early medieval Sri Lanka.

3. Another spectacular image dating from this time period is the massive 33-foot freestanding calcite stone Avalokiteśvara located 3 miles to the southeast of modern Okampitiye recently reconstructed by the Department of Archaeology (see head in Plate 21). Unlike the Buduruvegala and Situlpahuva Avalokiteśvaras, the style and ornamentation of this gigantic statue (the Department of Archaeology surmises that it may be the largest Avalokiteśvara image in the world) evoke an umistakably royal stamp. Given the size and fine craftmanship evident throughout the piece, it is possible that a royal or regal patron of the tenth century was a sponsor. However, that is only conjecture. The statue is said to have been blown apart by treasure hunters and is scheduled to be ceremoniously reopened to the public in July, 1990.

4. The history of these spectacular caves has been sketched by Anuradha Seneviratne [1983a].

5. Gourisar Bhattacharyya [1924] has noted several instances in texts, sculptures, and paintings in which Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara form a triad with the Buddha—Maitreya to the right and Avalokiteśvara to the left. He has provided a translation of the *Sādhanamāla* passage describing the *vajrāsanadhana:*

> To the right of God [*sic*] is Maitreya Bodhisattva who is white, two armed, and wears the Jaṭāmakuṭa (crown of matted hair), and carries the chowrie-jewel in the right hand, and Nāgakesara flower in the left. Similarly, to the left of the principal God [*sic*] is Lokeśvara of white complexion, carrying in his right hand the chowrie and the lotus in the left. These two

gods [*sic*] should be mediated upon as looking towards the face of the principal god [100–101].

Bhattacharya also notes that at the sixth-century A.D. Buddhist cave sites at Ajanta, Ellora, and Aurangabad, Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara are portrayed again as attendants of the Buddha [105]. Finally, he notes how Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara form a trio with the Buddha in eleventh-century Pāla art at Bishnupur in Bihar [107]. Thus, the trio at Dambulla may represent a footnote to the tradition that Gotama is the Buddha of the present age who has now attained *nirvāṇa,* Avalokiteśvara is the active bodhisattva of the present age who sustains the *dharma,* while Maitreya is the bodhisattva of the future who will become the next Buddha.

6. Plaster and clay images of Avalokiteśvara/Nātha are displayed prominently in *budugē*s at Räs Vehera (Sassaruva) off Anuradhapura and especially at Talgahagoda (see Plate 30) six miles south of Hunapahura and Urulevatte. Talgahagoda is not only linked to Hunapahura and Urulevatte by virtue of Nātha associations, but also by means of an elaborate myth collected in several versions by P. B. Meegaskumbura of the Department of Sinhala at Peradeniya. Here is a summary of one version: Narendra Simha, the last of the ethnically Sinhala kings (see pp. 140–144), lived in Asgiri korale (Kandy) and Naugala Nuvara in turn. Leaving his Vädda queen at Näugala, he went off to war telling her that after the battle he would send a messenger to wave a white flag if he was victorious and a red flag if he died in battle. He won the war but in playing a prank on his queen he ordered the red flag raised first and the white flag immediately thereafter. On his way to the mountaintop to raise the flags, the flag-bearer got drunk and forgot to raise the white flag. When the queen saw the red flag, she jumped off the cliff at Näugala along with her two children. However, the baby girl was saved because she landed in a cluster of creepers. The village chief of Galagama discovered her while hunting and kept the girl at Yatawatta and Ranalagoda. From there she was taken to Dūlläva (site of the Talgahagoda caves where the Nātha image inside the *budugē* is found) where she was raised until she came of age, at which time her identity became known to the king (not her father but a later king). The king made her his chief queen and their son was Senāsammata Vikramabahu, who constituted both the Asgiri Vihāraya and Poyamalu Vihāraya in her name. There are many other versions to this myth which are perhaps older in extant, but this one connects Naugala (the cliff that is the site of the two Nātha dēvālayas at Hunapahura and Urulevatte), Talgahagoda, Asgiriya, and Narendra Sinha (see Chapter 5) in an intimate way. My own conjecture is that these associations, paralleled only by those about Nātha that also connect these places and personalities, indicate a clear link in early Kandyan times between the Asgiriya Vihāraya and the cult of Nātha in this outlying area.

7. Ghosh [1980] has examined a legend related by Hiuen-tsang and repeated Alice Getty's [1962] view that the *stūpa* forming Maitreya's crown refers to the belief that a *stūpa* on Mount Kukkuṭapāda near Bodh Gaya covers a spot where the former Buddha Kasyapa is buried. According to the legend, Maitreya will go to the mountain, it will open miraculously, and Kāśyapa will come forth, giving Maitreya the garments of a buddha. Bhattacharya notes that the *stūpa* does not appear as an iconographic trait of

Maitreya in Gandhāran art. It finally appears in the Maitreya sculptures of Buddhist caves in western India in the post-Gandhāran period and is then consistently found in Himālayan Maitreya figures from at least the ninth century A.D. It is interesting to note that both Avalokiteśvara's *dhyāni* buddha in the crown and Maitreya's *stūpa* have been incorporated in late medieval Sinhala sculpture to indicate that the guardian deities are bodhisattvas destined ultimately for buddhahood.

4. The Politics of Deification in Medieval Sri Lanka

1. When Parākramabāhu VI was later established by the Chinese on the new Sinhalese throne at Kotte in 1415, court eulogists traced his lineage through Vijayabāhu V of Kurunegala and ultimately to the Lämaṅi family associated with the mythical first Sri Lankan Sinhala king, Vijaya (who purportedly landed on the island at the same time the Buddha was passing into his *parinibbāna* and embodied the Buddha's prophecy that Buddhism would flourish in purity and perpetuity in Lanka) [Paranavitana and Nicholas, 1961: 306]. While propaganda of this nature was to be expected at the time of Parākramabāhu's royal ascension, it is noteworthy that the family (Alakeśvara) in power during the latter part of the historically intervening Gampola dynasty was bypassed in the lineage-tracing process. Such an omission no doubt would have arisen because of the fact that with Parākramabāhu's placement on the throne by the Chinese, the rival and formerly ruling Alakeśvara family would have been considered illegitimate. Paranavitana has attempted to identify Vijayabāhu V's ancestors with two foreign invaders: Māgha and Candrabhānu:

> It is significant that the family which established its sovereignty [in Kurunegala] over the Sinhalese at about the same time as the Āryacakravartis became the masters of the northern kingdom was called Sävulu. It must have been because the family came from the Sävulu or Jāvaka region of North Ceylon. Vijayabāhu V, the Sävulu king, is eulogized in a Pāli poem composed in his reign as a scion of the family to which belonged Parākramabāhu, presumably the Great. The Jāvakas also called themselves Kalingas . . . [and] claimed to be of the dynasty founded by Vijaya, and counted Parākramabāhu the Great as one of them. *Vijayabāhu V was thus of the same stock as Māgha and Candrabhānu* [306; emphasis mine].

2. Godakumbura [1970: 129–34] adroitly points out that Geiger neglected to recognize this explicit reference to Nātha in the *Cūlavaṃsa,* choosing instead to translate the term generically as "protector" and interpreting it as a specific reference to Metteyya. At length, he argues for the identity of Nātha as Avalokiteśvara during the Gampola period and criticizes Geiger for not accepting Paranavitana's arguments in this vein.

3. It is difficult to imagine that this shrine would have been constructed by the Āryacakravartis, who were ultimately of Hindu Rajput origins and had served a lengthy tenure of service under the Pāṇḍyans. It is possible, however, that it was later founded by Prince Sapumal, who ruled over Jaffna during the latter part of the reign of Parākramabāhu VI, for there is much surviving folklore indicating Sapumal's veneration of Nātha. Oral traditions still current at the Hunapahura Nātha *dēvālaya* northwest of modern Matale assert that Sapumal began his march to Jaffna underneath the Nā tree

at the Nāga Rājamahāvihāra in Kotte before stopping in Hunapahura, where he vowed to return and establish a Nātha *dēvālaya* if he was successful in defeating the Āryacakravarti.

4. At this time, these four gods were clearly established as the traditional four guardian deities of Lanka; see Fernando [1908: 26]. It is not until the later Kandyan period that Vibhīṣana and Saman are replaced by Nātha and Pattinī to constitute a new quartet.

5. Secondarily, in the Sagama rock inscription, Nātha is perceived to act in association with the god of the Nā (ironwood) tree, the further significance of which is seen in mythic and folkloric literature deriving from the later Kandyan period. In a number of the local *dēvālaya* myths, the power of Nātha is specifically conflated or confused with that of this nature divinity. In the *Anāgatavaṃsa Desanā,* the Nā tree is Metteyya's *bodhi.* Nātha's association here with the god of the Nā tree may have contributed to his identification as the future Buddha Metteyya in the popular Sinhala mind.

6. In contemporary popular local traditions, the female deities at the Vegiriya and Pasgama shrines are identified by villagers and the *kapurāla*s as Pattinī, thus indicating that the original *tantr*ic identity of Tārā has long since been forgotten. In spite of this identification with Pattinī, the *kapurāla*s at both Nātha *dēvālaya*s refer to the goddess during their liturgical *yātikā* as "Biso Baṇḍāra" or "queen." According to them, Biso Baṇḍāra is the wife of Nātha, yet there are no mythic or literary traditions that link Pattinī to Nātha.

7. *Sandēśaya* literature, known as *dūta kāvya,* may have been influenced by the patterns and style of the ornate and elegant Sanskrit poem *Meghadūta* ("Cloud Messenger") written by the celebrated poet and dramatist Kālidāsa, whose own inspiration in turn may have derived from the paradigmatic episodes of the epic *Rāmāyana,* in which the captured Sita receives a message from her beloved King Rāma through the monkey god Hanuman. In the *Meghadūta,* a cloud is beseeched to act as a go-between carrying a message of opined love from a *yakṣa* to his wife, from whom he has been separated for some 8 months of time. Throughout the poem, he assures his wife of his continued devotion and urges her to await the consummation of his return. Unlike later *sandēśaya* literature, however, it is a thoroughly secular work of art. Nevertheless, the incorporation of this genre of literature into Sinhala is a landmark literary event.

8. Tradition holds that Śrī Rāhula was born into nobility, the son of a certain Vikramabāhu who is said to have been the prince of the Kandavuru-kula. It is also said that Vikramabāhu met an untimely death, perhaps at the hands of Alakeśvara's forces at Rayigama. Fearing the prince's enemies, his wife and Śrī Rāhula's mother, Princess Sīlavatī, took refuge in the harem of Parākramabāhu VI and subsequently became one of his favorite queens. The traditions continue that Śrī Rāhula was then raised as the adopted son of the king [Ilangasinha, 1972: 159; Wijesekera, 1934: iv]. In verse 23 of his celebrated *Kāvyaśēkharaya,* Śrī Rāhula says he was the grandson of the famous monk Uttaramūla of Dematana who lived at Totagamuwe, a fact that seems to be corroborated by the *Kōkila Sandēśaya* (verse 81). Thus, Śrī Rāhula was connected not

only to royalty, but as a result of the practice of the time that only the sons of nobility should head up the major Buddhist monastic institutions, he could trace a powerful monastic lineage for himself as well.

Aprocryphal stories are variously connected to Śrī Rāhula's youth, emphasizing his remarkable powers of memory. As a result of Śrī Rāhula's native brilliance, Vīdāgama Thera, also the spiritual teacher of Parākramabāhu VI, the head of the Vanavasi fraternity of monks and reputedly instrumental in placing Parākramabāhu VI on the throne, was selected as his initial preceptor [Ilangasinha, 1972: 145], while his later guru was none other than his grandfather [Wijesekera, 1934: iv] or uncle [Meddegama, 1985: 4–5], Uttaramūla, who at the time was the head of the Vijayabāhu Pirivena at Totagamuwe and presumably the head of the *gamavasi* fraternity [Wijesekera, 1934: vi–vii]. What these traditions seek to establish is the fact that Śrī Rāhula was intimately connected to both the central spiritual and temporal authorities of the time.

9. In the fifteenth century, Śrī Rāhula epitomized the popular magical orientation and syncretic tendencies among the *gamavasi* ("village monks") fraternity in juxtaposition to the *vanavasi* ("forest monks") of the time. This division of the *sangha* between village monks and forest monks dates to the first century B.C., but it is not formally referred to as marking a division in the *sangha katikāvatas* and in various inscriptions until the thirteenth century A.D. Referring, according to some scholars, to a monastic division between village monks and forest monks succeeding the sectarian identities prevalent in the Anuradhapura period between the Mahāvihāra, Abhyagiri, and Jetavana *nikāyas*, it became the chief means of discriminating between the orientations of *bhikkhus* following the unification of the *sangha* during the Polonnaruva period.

From the orthodox Theravāda perspective, monastic involvement in magical works, let alone politics, is a form of behavior reflecting a concession to worldly (*laukika*) attachment. And it is precisely this perspective that the *vanavasi* monks claimed was indicative of their *gamavasi* brethren. Obviously, the two orientations reveal philosophical differences with regard to the monastic vocation. The *vanavasi* monks claim to closely follow the literal teachings of the Buddha regarding the importance of renunciation from secular life and the requirements of seclusion needed for spiritual progress in meditation. The *gamavasi* monks claim to closely follow the literal teachings of the Buddha with regard to the *sangha* being a helpful refuge unto the laity. Śrī Rāhula, despite his great academic learning, was identified clearly as a *gamavasi* monk because of his involvement in politics, his knowledge of language and literature outside the pale of Pāli tradition, and his apparent engagement in the occult arts.

Even as recently as 1984–1985, Sinhala newspapers in Sri Lanka published a series of articles by various Christian and Buddhist authors, academic and otherwise, regarding the legacy of Śrī Rāhula's apotropaic powers. The Buddhists argue that a body now entombed at Goa in India and remaining in a remarkable state of almost perfect preservation is actually that of Śrī Rāhula. Its state of preservation is attributed to Rāhula's reputed knowledge and use of magical oils. Christians argue that the body is none other than that of Saint Francis Xavier.

Other fantastic stories current among *kapurālas* living near modern Telwatte Rājamahāvihāra south of Ambalangoda (a *vihāra* that, according to popular tradition, contains a Nātha *dēvālaya* that was part of the campus of Śrī Rāhula's famed Vijayabāhu Pirivena at Totagamuwe and center of the *gamavasi* fraternity) enthusiastically proclaim that the miraculous potency popularly attributed to many of the sacred caves in the area is the direct and lasting result of the surviving powers of the famous monk/poet/magician. Popular legends associated with the magical powers of Śrī Rāhula are legion in the contemporary folk culture of the Sinhalese living on the southwestern coast of the island. Śrī Rāhula's continued popularity is so great that vestiges of the cult of Nātha in this particular region of Sri Lanka are probably sustained or are largely due to the god's perceived relation to this esteemed monk who is known to have venerated him enthusiastically at the historic seat of Nātha in Totagamuwe (allegedly at modern Talwatte).

10. Ultimately, the influence of Śiva on Nātha is seen as late as the nineteenth century, given the manner in which Nātha is depicted in the flag of the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya* dating from then.

11. An often-noted verse (203) of Śrī Rāhula's own *Parevi Sandēsáya* states that when he was 15, he received a boon from Skanda (Kataragama Dēviyō) to become *sadbhāṣa-parameśvara,* "supreme master of the seven languages" [Ilangasinha, 1972: 115; Wijesekera, 1934: vi]. There is little doubt, judging from his works, that Śrī Rāhula was a veritable literary genius. In his epic poem, *Kāvyasēkharaya,* Śrī Rāhula created a new genre of Sinhala literature by combining a secular form of poetry with the intent to preach *Dharma.* The result is remarkable not only in terms of style but in content as well.

For instance, *Kāvyasēkharaya,* intended as a poetic sermon for his royal sister and daughter of Parākramabāhu VI, Lokanātha (whose very name suggests familiarity with the deity of which we are so concerned), contains a large section depicting various complex subtleties of Theravāda Buddhist thought expressed in relatively simple and clear language. *Kāvyasēkharaya* also contains, on the other hand, some vivid analyses of difficulties encountered by the laity in married life. Moreover, a number of passages reveal Śrī Rāhula's ease at describing sexual relations and the physical beauty of young women. In one chapter of *Kāvyasēkharaya,* Śrī Rāhula describes the first night of sexual delight between a certain Senaka and his bride in such detail "that one would wonder whether the poet had been peeping through the key hole of the door where this couple had slept" [Meddegama, 1985: 2]. Whether or not this was so, *Kāvyasēkharaya* is regarded by many as almost encyclopedic with regard to not only religious matters per se but with the problems of lay secular life. It articulates a medieval worldview on how the religious life is to be lived in the secular context.

12. Dewaraja [1971] has put the matter this way in the opening sentence of her book: "The Kandyan kingdom, situated in the central highlands of Ceylon, is the *terra incognita* in the history of the Island. Though its foundation was laid as recently as the fifteenth century, in several respects we know less about it than we do about the

Anuradhapura kingdom" [1]. Here, Dewaraja is pointing out the dearth of material resources available to reconstruct the social and cultural history of the Kandyan kingdom, especially during its earliest years.

But the fact that I have found only one reference to Nātha during the 230-year period between the fifteenth-century reign of Bhuvanekabāhu VI (Prince Sapumal) of Kotte (1470–1476) and the eighteenth-century reign of Narendra Siṃha of Kandy (1707–1739) does not mean that the cult of Nātha remained moribund during this time. Not only were several significant myths recounting the origins of Nātha *dēvālayas* in the Kandyan culture area probably generated during this period, but these same myths reflect further transformations in the character and cult of Nātha. Specifically, the discussion in this chapter and the following three will demonstrate that the conception of Nātha's *laukika* power reached its fullest measure of cultic expression in the late medieval Kandyan context before, after some vacillation, Nātha was finally recognized as the future Buddha Maitrī.

5. The Mythicization of History

1. See especially Kapferer [1988]; Tambiah [1986]; and Greenwald [1978].

2. See, for instance, the Sagama rock inscription in *Epigraphia Zeylanica,* vol. 4: 310–11.

3. Mr. Bala Banda Tennakoon of Napana, Dumbara, who was so kind as to locate an *ola* leaf manuscript of the *Nātha Deviyange Täbime Upata* in his possession, to sing the poem for recording purposes, and to allow me to have it transcribed, states that the text is traceable to Vikramabāhu III of Gampola (1357–1374). Dr. Anuradha Seneviratna and Professor P. B. Meegaskumbura of the Department of Sinhala and Professor R. A. L. H. Gunawardana of the Department of History at the University of Peradeniya, all of whom assisted me in gaining an accurate translation of the poem, are of the opinion, on the basis of substance and style, that it dates to the early eighteenth century.

4. Kelaniya is mentioned in the *Mahāvaṃsa* as one of the four sites in Lanka where the Buddha appeared during his alleged "visits" to the island. While its history until at least the fourteenth century is rather obscure, Kelaniya *bhikkhus* are referred to by the fifth-century Theravāda commentator Buddhaghosa. In addition, two tenth-century Kelaniya inscriptions mention the salutary importance of conduct by royal officials and the presence of a "bathrobe" relic of the Buddha allegedly located there. The late-twelfth-century Polonnaruva king, Niśśanka Malla, is also thought to have made a pilgrimage to Kelaniya.

5. He is so regarded in the fourteenth-century Lankatilaka inscriptions from the Gampola period along with Skanda, Upulvan, and Saman. The composition of the four national guardian deities varies from one region in Sri Lanka to another.

6. In his *Celebration of Demons* Kapferer [1983] notes that "deities and demons, as multiple refractions of the process constituting form in existence, are also structurally

inter-related in accordance with the substance constitution of their form. This is apparent in exorcist conceptions of the linkage between various deities and demons and the manner by which exorcists symbolically present the beings concerned" [116]. He goes on to cite the following associations:

God	Element	Planet	Substance/fluid	Agent	Color
Kataragama	Fire	Mars	Blood/bile	Rīrī Yaka	Red
Viṣṇu	Wind	Saturn	Breath	Mahāsona	Blue
Nātha	Water	Moon	Phlegm	Sanni Yakka	White
Pattinī	Water	Moon	Phelgm	Sanni Yakka	White

Nevill [1954] has stated that "Nātha's bangle is [usually] invoked along with those of almost all other deities. . . . The halamba or bangle symbolizes the orbit of a planet and may be used also to indicate a sphere of influence" [vol. 1: 126]. The symbols associated with Nātha and Pattinī in exorcism rites or astrology would seem to indicate the relative passivity and purity of these deities in *laukika* affairs. Water, the moon, and the color white are recessive in character. The further association with the Sanni Yaka, however, is quite significant. Pattinī is well known for her ability to cure diseases, and traces of this power attributed to Nātha are also evident in contemporary Sri Lanka. The Sanni Yaka actually refers to 18 demons who traditionally are taken to represent 18 types of diseases. These demons are painted on "medicine masks" in the local culture of the Southern Province and are invoked in exorcisms in order to cure the respective diseases that they symbolically represent.

7. *Doḷaha Dēviyangē Kāvi* may be found in *Sinhala Kāvya Sangrahāva,* published by the Sri Lanka National Museum in Colombo in 1964. Professor P. B. Meegaskumbura of the Department of Sinhala at the University of Peradeniya kindly translated pp. 221–26 of this volume for me.

6. The Power of Place

1. The *radala* form the upper stratum of the *govigama* (cultivator) caste from whose ranks the Kandyan kings generally appointed their bureaucracy and provincial administrators. For a characterization of the sociopolitical importance of *radala* families in modern Kandy, see H. L. Seneviratne [1978: 136–70].

2. The *pirit* ceremony is probably the most popularity celebrated Buddhist ritual in modern Sri Lanka. Essentially, it consists of a small number of *bhikkhus* gathered under a ritually constructed canopy made out of leaves from the Nā (ironwood), *bodhi,* or coconut trees and covered with white linen. The monks chant prescribed Pāli *suttas* from the Theravāda canon. The magical power generated by chanting these sacred verses is charged into a thread, one end of which is held by the monks while the other is placed in a pitcher of water. At the conclusion of the chanting, which nowadays reverberates over loudspeaker systems and may last for several days but usually only for 1 night, the thread is taken out of the water pitcher and held by all monastic

participants and lay observers, who form a circle. The thread is then cut into small lengths and tied to the wrists of everyone present. The ritual may be held in virtually any place or any time for any celebration or commemoration. It is frequently celebrated whenever new buildings are erected, in conjunction with the extended funeral and memorial services for the dead, at the beginning of government parliamentary sessions, etc. The general purpose, which may be adapted to any occasion, is peace and prosperity. In some ways, the increased popularity of *pirit* has minimized the former importance of the gods. Or, to put the matter another way, its increased popularity indicates how modern Theravāda monasticism has increasingly accommodated itself to the *laukika* needs of the laity. For an authoritative study of the rite, see Lily de Silva [1981].

3. *Kāvaḍi* is the form of dance performed sometimes in an ecstatic state of bliss by devotees of Kataragama Dēviyō (Skanda, Murugan̲, the six-headed son of Lord Śiva). Its recent inclusion in the Vegiriya *dēvālaya perahära* is a sign of the increasing popularity of the deity among Sinhala Buddhists. For a description of the dance and an argument for why Kataragama is becoming so popular, see Obeyesekere [1978].

4. *Rāṇḍoli* actually refers to "queen." In traditional Kandyan times, the *rāṇḍoli* was the queen's palanquin. During the *perahära,* it is paraded in the process of carrying the "weapons" of the *dēvālaya* god. It is clearly a symbol of power and may have formerly been associated with the *śakti* (creative energy, feminine counterpart to a male deity) of the deity.

5. The *Vitti of Dodanvela Dēvālaya* was translated privately for me by P. B. Meegaskumbura from Pragnaloka, 1952. *Vitti* literature, in general, is a collection of popular stories about sacred places usually concerned with the definition of *dēvālaya* boundaries.

6. The following account of this "semantic redistribution" was formulated by Professor P. B. Meesgaskumbura of the Department of Sinhala, University of Peradeniya.

7. Central Power, Sacred Order

1. In the contemporary context, emphasis is placed upon visiting friends and insisting upon a great deal of rest and relaxation. Although April 12 and 13 are the only official holidays, it is necessary to stock up on goods and to finish all errands during the preceding week, as very little in the way of work gets accomplished during the week or more that follows.

2. I acknowledge with great gratitude the assistance provided by the Venerable Reverend Dhammaloka of the Kandy Nātha *dēvālaya* and of the Department of Sinhala, University of Peradeniya, who tape-recorded the proceedings of the ritual distribution of oil during the Kārtti *mangālyaya* in 1984. Surprisingly, the resulting compilation is at significant variance with the list published by Winslow [1984: 283]. Winslow's list, which was obtained from another scholar, is for the distribution of

husked and unhusked rice distributed during Alut Sāl on Durutu Pōya. Almost every itemized share of unhusked rice in Winslow's list is the same amount of oil accorded to *dēvālaya*s in Rev. Dhammaloka's list. However, in Winslow's list, none of the *vihāraya*s have been included. Erroneously, Winslow's list refers to Viṣṇu as the presiding deity at Vegiriya. Furthermore, in an otherwise incisive article about the political geography of Sinhala deities in which she concludes that "the pantheon, because of the territorial specificity of the gods, reflects and may very well have an effect upon the nature of local-level territorial integration in the Sri Lankan state" [289], also states with regard to Nātha and Pattinī: "Neither appears to have adjacent territories wherein Nātha and Pattinī are worshipped as local deities" [278]. We have noted in great detail that Nātha is worshiped as a local deity in Vegiriya, Pasgama, Dodanwela, and Hunapahura.

3. This portion of the *Mandārampura Puvata* was translated from the Sinhala for me by Anuradha Seneviratna, Department of Sinhala, University of Peradeniya.

4. Tradition holds that the alms bowl relic was originally brought to Sri Lanka through the efforts of Aśoka's missionary son, Mahinda, and that it was protected by Sinhalese kings and the *bhikkhu*s of the Abhayagiri fraternity in Anuradhapura for some 12 centuries. During the later Polonnaruva period, it became the express duty of the Sinhalese king to provide for its security. Like the Daḷadā, its possession was regarded as a symbol of royal legitimacy [Bardwell Smith, 1980: 310].

5. Although I eventually gained access to these holy areas within each of the Nātha *dēvālaya*s, permission was granted only after prolonged diplomacy over the span of many occasions and repeated assurances and "proofs" regarding my own state of nonpollution.

6. The view of Godakumbura and Paranavitana seems substantiated by the *Vaḍiga-tantraya,* [Samarasinghe, n.d.: 20], a minor text on exorcism that contains "Upul-varuṇa" for Upulvan.

7. H. L. Seneviratne [1978] notes that the milk from the *jak* tree "is a symbol of auspiciousness and prosperity" [71]; Nigel Palmer [Wood and Palmer, 1984: 77] respins the traditional Sinhala yarn that a man with a *jak* tree is never wanting for food and friends.

8. Private communication, Professor P. B. Meegaskumbura, Department of Sinhala, University of Peradeniya.

8. Nātha and the "Rock Chief"

1. Translated for me privately by Bhikkhu Alutnuvara Upatissa, a master's student in the Department of History, University of Peradeniya, and a research assistant of mine during this phase of the project.

2. For an excellent discussion and interpretation, see Gombrich [1966].

3. Euhemerism is the religiocultural process by which hero figures of a given society are attributed divine status after death.

4. The identities of the 12 *baṇḍāras*, like the identities of the four national guardian deities, vary from region to region throughout Sri Lanka. While the cult of the *baṇḍāras* is somewhat moribund in the Southern and Western provinces (owing perhaps to the fact that the Kandyan system of political hierarchy and administration was rarely, if even intermittently, installed in these areas), and while the somewhat equivalent cult of the *yakās* (Sinhala: *yakka;* Pali: *yakkha;* Sanskrit: *yakṣa)* is fast dying out with the fading of traditional Väddа culture, the cults of the *baṇḍāras* remain quite strong in the remote parts of the Kandyan highlands. Indeed, there is a good deal of confusion, probably the result of Sinhala assimilation, in the respective cults of the *baṇḍāras* and the *yakās*. In many areas, the traditions have obviously become closely intertwined.

Among the Väddas, Seligmann and Seligmann [1911: 164–73] reported that Gange ("River") Baṇḍāra was one of "the most important spiritual agencies" who "was in charge of rivers and also insect pests." He was invoked in the *kolamaduwa,* a dance performed to insure success in hunting, and he bestowed luck upon those gathering honey. Gombrich [1971: 185–86] found Gange Baṇḍāra consistently listed among the *doḷaha dēviyō* ("12 gods") of the Buddhist villagers he studied in the Dumbara Valley and reports that whereas 10 of these gods were born of woman, Gange Baṇḍāra was born of a blue gem in the blue sea and, as such, is regarded as a god born without the affect of "pollution." Personifying water, Gange Baṇḍāra retains purifying powers, indicating that he is highly revered and given a high status similar to the one he has held among the Väddas.

Gala ("Rock") Yakā was not universally known in the various Vädda communities, but Seligmann and Seligmann [1911: 182–89, 260–63] reported observing at least one instance in which he was thought to have taken possession of a dancer spinning a pot of rice, and that this practice was also known within the context of divine possessions attributed to Kande ("Hill") Yakā with whom Gala Yakā was frequently confused. Kande Dēviyō appears on two of the lists of the *doḷaha dēviyō* collected by Gombrich [1971: 185–86].

Obeyesekere [1984: 286] notes that Kaḍavara Devindu is among the *doḷaha dēviyō* at Hanguranketa; Gombrich [1971: 185–86] found his name on all three of his informants' lists in the Dumbara Valley; according to Parker [1984: 157–58, 667], the term *kaḍavara* derives from the Tamil *kaḍa* ("to step aside," or "escape") + *varar* ("celestials") and as a name refers to the seventh son of Umayangana (Pārvatī—Siva's spouse) who escaped the grasp of Īśvara (Śiva) when the mighty god crushed his six sons together to form Skanda (Kataragama Dēviyō); later, he became the chief of the Kaḍavara District and one of the "Five Ministers" in the "court" and cult of Aiyaṉār, who is extremely popular in the North Central Province. Among the Väddas, Seligmann and Seligmann [1971: 270–72] noted that *kaḍavara* refers to a class of *yakās*, specifically the spirits of 11 deceased ancestors who received blood-smeared leaves during the *avana* ceremony. They are also understood to be servants of Kataragama Dēviyō (Skanda) but sometimes are viewed by "fire walkers" to be one single deity [Obeyesekere, 1984: 69].

Finally, Kaḷukumāra, "the Black Prince," is a highly feared power who assumes both divine and demonic forms. He is known to bring hysteria to young women and frequently appears as a seductive young lover in dreams and visions [Obeyesekere, 1984: 43, 69]. Gombrich [1971: 188] notes a myth in which Kaḷukumāra, a Kandyan prince, was defeated by his father, the king, in a "bird game" and, as a result, was banished to the area around the Maha Oya (river). Parker [1984: 143] says that Kaḷukumāra is regarded as a demonic incarnation of Gāja Bāhu I (A.D. 113–35], realizing the fruits of that king's cruelties that were incurred during his invasion of south India. In another context [153], Parker notes that Kaḷukumāra was regarded as an incarnation of Nīlā, one of Gāja Bāhu's chiefs, whose prowess is extolled in many popular ballads in the North Central Province and who became one of the "Five Gods" of the Vanniyas.

These four *baṇḍāra* deities, among others popular in the region around Urulevatte and its two Nātha *dēvālaya*s, receive warrants from Nātha to engage in action. As in our discussion of the relationship between Nātha and Däḍimunda at Pasgama, Nātha is viewed as not being implicated in the nefarious deeds that are sometimes the result of these deities' activities. According to the *kapurāla*, Gange *Baṇḍāra* and Gala *Baṇḍāra* are also incapable of doing evil. Kaḍavara Baṇḍāra and Kaḷukumāra, however, "must be ordered to behave." That Gala *baṇḍāra* is specifically venerated in the annual *mangālyaya* at Urulevatte indicates his unusual prominence in this region.

5. Bahirava is a form of Śiva and is regarded as the "Lord of the Underworld." Parker [1984] states: "In Ceylon his special function is acting as a guardian of sacred edifices such as dāgäbas and vihāras and treasures, and everything underground" [142].

6. Translated and summarized privately for me by P. B. Meegaskumbura, Department of Sinhala, University of Peradeniya.

9. Conclusion

1. This dating of the pillars was offered by Professor R. A. L. H. Gunawardana based upon his examination of fragmentary epigraphic etchings found on the pillars.

2. There are two images of Nātha, both very royal in appearance, found within the Telwatte *vihāraya*. The image within the *dēvālaya* is very similar to the giant Nātha found at the Nāga *vihāraya* in Kotte (see Plate 33), except for its size and the fact that no *dhyāni* buddha is found in the crown. The second image, located in the *budugē*, is a 4-foot free-standing stucco construction containing a *dhyāni* buddha in a hat similar to the one worn by a local sea guardian deity (Devol Dēviyō).

3. The forms of Buddhist thought emerging in the twentieth century go beyond the social expressions of what Malalgoda [1976] termed the "Protestant Buddhism" of the nineteenth century. Bechert [1966] and Southwold [1983] have discussed various facets of "Buddhist modernism," including attempts to argue that Buddhist thought is fully compatible and anticipates modern science, socialism, democracy, economic development, etc. "Buddhist modernism" would seem to be a Sinhala effort to make

Buddhism ideologically pragmatic, to reestablish its primacy as a basis for a modern worldview, to incorporate the best of foreign ideas, and to relate them to the truth of the Buddha's *lōkōttara* path. As such, it confirms our thesis about how imported notions are assimilated into Sinhala Buddhism. There is a strain, however, of exclusivity in "Buddhist modernism" that is evident in attempts to strip away traditional noncanonical beliefs that are not considered "modern."

4. Curiously, during the dark half of the month, Hūniyam is regarded as a male *yakka* who works as an effective agent for sorcerers. But during the light half of the month, Hūniyam is a benign female who works positively on behalf of devotees. This androgynous deity is the most involved of all the gods in the affairs of human beings and is never listed among the guardian or national gods.

5. See, for instance, Lynn de Silva [1974: 30–32, 164–65].

6. Kitagawa [1988: 16–17] describes how both the primary and secondary "three refuges" often coalesced or were conflated in "post-Aśokan" Buddhism, primarily in Sri Lanka.

7. Malalgoda [1976: 73] writes: "The relegation of Kandy into the background and the emergence of rival centres of Buddhist activity, especially in the southern and western regions of the island, were features of major consequence in the nineteenth-century religious scene. Not surprisingly, the decline of Kandy in the religious sphere went hand in hand with its decline in the political sphere."

8. For a discussion of the specific religious significance attributed to *bodhi pūjā* in the contemporary context, see Seneviratne and Wickremeratne [1980].

9. See especially D. C. Vijayavardhana's *Revolt in the Temple: Composed to Commemorate 2500 Years of the Land, the Race and the Faith* [1953] and the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry, *The Betrayal of Buddhism* [1956].

10. I am using, in part, the typological analysis constructed by Jan Nattier [1988], who, having studied the meanings of the Maitreya myth in various Asian cultural and historical contexts, sees its expression taking four morphological forms: (1) "here/later"—the standard recension of the Maitreya myth in which Maitreya's advent is not expected until the distant future (this is the view of the Sinhala *Anagātavaṃsa Desanā* and of the village Buddhists I came to know during fieldwork); (2) "there/later"—corresponding to the aspiration of being reborn in Tuṣita heaven where Maitreya could be encountered (Nattier notes that this type of thinking was eventually absorbed into the Amida myth of Sukhāvatī, the "pure land"); (3) "there/now"—realization of Maitreya's presence through mystical ascent to Tusita heaven in this life; and (4) "here/now"—"realized eschatology" characteristic of antiestablishment millenarian movements in which it is passionately thought that the world will be renewed or transformed imminently with Maitreya's advent. To these four forms, we will need to add a variant of the fourth type: The demythologized existential pragmatism of "Buddhist modernism."

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